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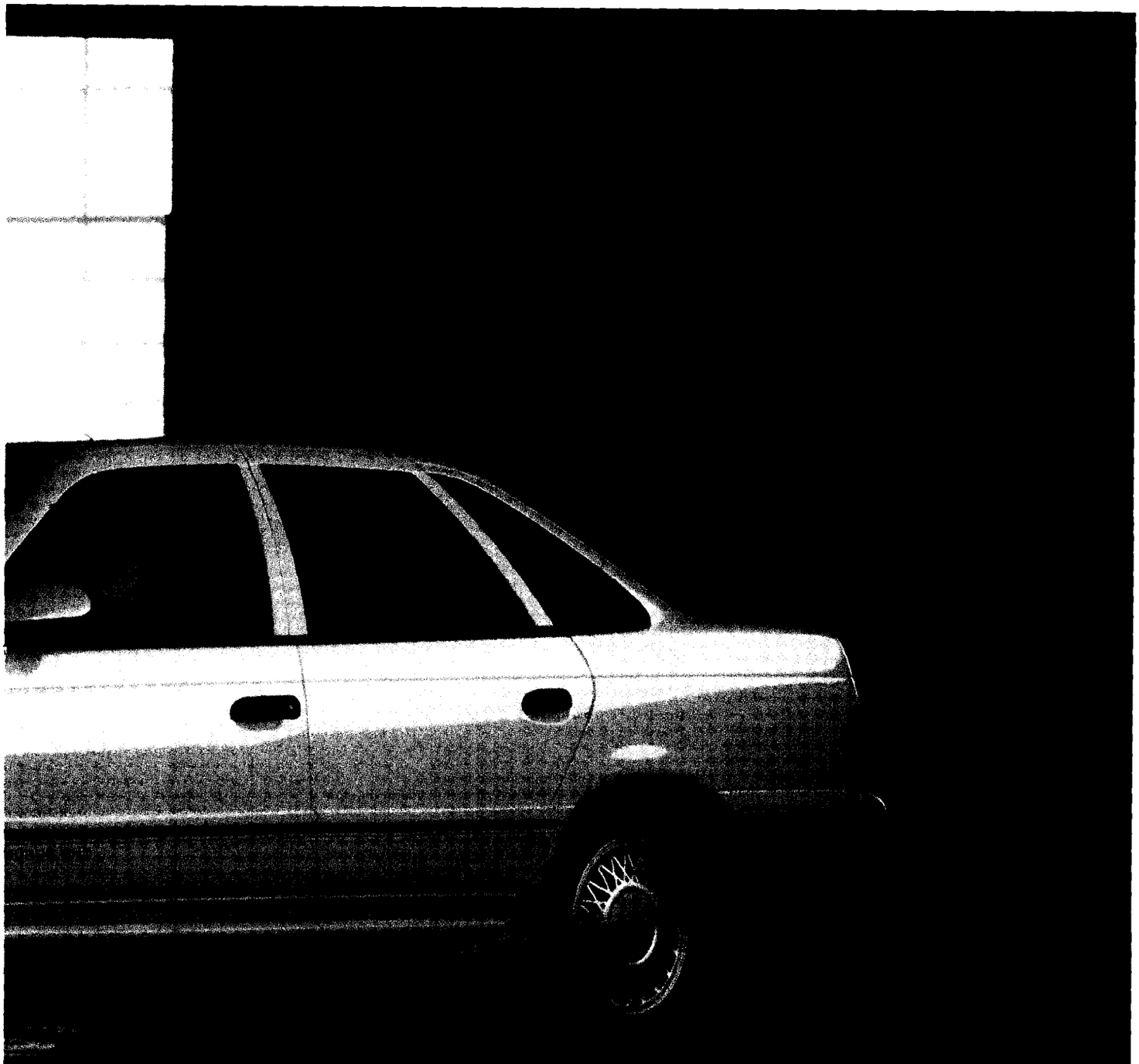

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CORRESPONDENCE

Gimmick goddess

To the editors:

Barbara Ehrenreich wishes to claim unique status for Roseanne Barr as "zeitgeist goddess" and embodiment of working-class radical feminism ("The Wretched of the Hearth," April 2), but Barr is just one more in a long line of barbed female comics including Phyllis Diller, Totie Fields (who was also enormous), and Joan Rivers. The tough-talking, barrel-shaped working woman has also been a staple of the movies at least since Marie Dressler stomped the deck as "Tugboat Annie." As for television, Ehrenreich's assertion that " 'Roseanne' the sitcom . . . is a radical departure simply for featuring blue-collar Americans" betrays a staggering ignorance of the medium. Shows like "The Life of Reilly" and "The Honeymooners," to name only two, covered this turf with more wit and invention in any episode than "Roseanne" has displayed in its entirety.

In fact, Roseanne might well be seen as the child the Kramdens never had, a genetic recombination of Ralph's girth and bottom-dog class consciousness and Alice's sly, stoic sarcasm. Unfortunately—but all too typically given the debased state to which TV comedy has fallen since its Golden Age—Barr lacks the technical skills as either vaudevillian or actress that Jackie Gleason and Audrey Meadows so effortlessly deployed. Her sole stock-in-trade consists of slinging mudballs at the broad side of the male chauvinist barn or scything through ranks of stereotyped straw men set up for her by the show's writing staff. For this undemanding labor Barr is paid a weekly wage beyond the wildest dreams of the class she purports to represent, and whose actual reality she travesties. In a few more years she will be seen as what she in fact is—another slick product of network corporate cynicism, a passing gimmick, the jumbo proletarian version of Pee Wee Herman.

T. K. McMAHON
Los Angeles, California

Party favors

To the editors:

Robert Kuttner's statement "At the Democratic Leadership Council's 1989 conference in Philadelphia, Ben Wattenberg publicly proposed kicking [Jesse] Jackson out of the party" ("What's the Beef?" April 2) is not only completely false, but preposterous in a way that shows that Kuttner doesn't know much about political parties in America.

I never said it, publicly or privately, there or anywhere else. I don't believe it now; I didn't believe it then. And if I did believe it, I wouldn't have the faintest idea of how to do it: What do you do to "kick someone out" of an American political party? Go to his registrar to prevent him from voting in a Democratic primary? If I said it, why didn't Kuttner report on it when he initially wrote about the DLC Philadelphia meeting in his Diarist in your April 3, 1989 issue? In fact, in that article he wrote two accurate paragraphs on what I actually did say.

As it happens, I do disagree with Jackson's views. Does Kuttner? Will he tell us all about it in a forthcoming issue of TNR?

BEN J. WATTENBERG
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:

Robert Kuttner's beef with the DLC is evidently that it has had the effrontery to say out loud what the American people have been telling us in one presidential election after another: what has passed for liberalism in the past twenty years is bankrupt.

Having been present at the creation of the DLC, I plead guilty to this breach of political decorum. However, it struck us back in 1985 that the party needed a robust debate over first principles a lot more than it needed to maintain a pretense of harmony—one that, in any case, rarely fooled the public. Moreover, it's odd to be admonished in the pages of TNR, of all places, that a critical reexamination of the ends and means of contemporary liberalism is inimical to the Democratic Party's renewal.

The deeper error in Kuttner's tendentious revision of recent party history is the assertion that Democrats now agree on political fundamentals. As the recent child-care debate showed, the cleavage between "sixties liberals" and "nineties liberals" goes well beyond turf battles. Although the fight between the party's fundamentalists and its reformers is not over, Kuttner is right to see Democrats moving in the DLC's mainstream direction. But to suppose that Democrats can reconstruct a vibrant liberalism without first challenging the ideological and programmatic status quo is akin to thinking that the Reformation could have been launched without any unkind references to Catholic orthodoxy.

WILL MARSHALL
Washington, D.C.

The writer is president of the Progressive Policy Institute.

To the editors:

Robert Kuttner belittles the Democratic Leadership Council's differences with "liberal fundamentalist" Democrats by citing the DLC's support for an expanded Earned-Income Tax Credit. He fails to grasp that a goal cherished by liberals, reducing poverty, can be reached through non-bureaucratic or conservative means. The tax-credit proposal would empower the poor to control their own resources and would avoid the old minimum-wage pitfall of destroying thousands of jobs.

If other Democrats followed the DLC back to the mainstream, the party could make a comeback. Will that happen? Consider this admission by a leading Democrat: "After we lost we didn't tell the American people that they were wrong. Instead we began asking what our mistakes had been." Sound promising? Alas, these words come from the 1984 acceptance speech of the pluperfect liberal fundamentalist, Walter Mondale.

JOHN J. PITNEY JR.
Arlington, Virginia

Robert Kuttner replies:

At last year's DLC meeting, Wattenberg invoked the Democrats' schism of 1948 as "cleansing," and urged "a good fight" intended to make Jackson unwelcome in the party. If I overstated that as "kicking out" Jackson, I apologize. Marshall's analogy to the Protestant Reformation is revealing. Does Marshall really want two parties? (For a Reformationist, he sounds more like Torquemada than Luther.) The Earned-Income Tax Credit is a fine illustration of the gratuitous infighting. Liberals support it. Experts urge a minimum wage plus an EITC, so that the taxpayer doesn't pay the entire freight via a huge new tax expenditure. But the party right, looking for an anti-labor niche, prefers a good litmus test to a successful coalition.

Smoking dopes

To the editors:

In his critique of the "scientific" justifications for workplace drug testing ("Your Analysis Is Faulty," April 2), John Horgan skillfully dismantles a Navy study that showed that recruits who test positive for drugs before induction are more likely to be discharged eventually than those who test negative. But Horgan seems to have overlooked another argument against the Navy's conclusions. If one assumes that the potential recruits had a pretty good idea that they were going to be tested for drugs, then one can also assume that those who came up positive not only used marijuana, but were too undisciplined to stay off the stuff for a month prior. Those who tested negative, on the other hand, surely included many tokers who managed to abstain for a few weeks. In which case the study provides us with a thor-

continued on page 44

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For a new equality

The venerable liberal crusade for income equality is doomed. The gap between rich and poor will keep on growing, and no one knows how to stop it.

It's time for the Democrats to try a different strategy.

BY MICKEY KAUS

Article on page 18.

4 CORRESPONDENCE Roseanne Barr's big mouth, the Democrats' right wing, &c.

6 MICHAEL KINSLEY **TRB: ARE COMPANIES PEOPLE?** Does Time Warner deserve freedom of speech?

7 THE EDITORS **BARRY'S FREE RIDE** Three months after his arrest for buying crack, the mayor's comeback is under way. **DOLEDRUMS** The Senate GOP leader's misplaced indignation. **NOTEBOOK** Brinkley, Garbo.

9 MORTON KONDRACKE **SADDAMNATION** Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is one of the world's most evil leaders. Why is the Bush administration going easy on him?

13 ROBERT BAZELL **SCIENCE AND SOCIETY: THE DRINK LINK** The public wants a genetic connection to alcoholism. Scientists oblige by concluding that one exists.

14 CLAY CHANDLER **TOKYO'S DR. NO** Shintaro Ishihara, Japan's leading America-basher, is making a return visit to the United States. A warm welcome seems unlikely.

18 MICKEY KAUS **FOR A NEW EQUALITY** Liberals are still preoccupied with the idea of reducing the income gap between the rich and the rest. But large economic forces are making that gap bigger, and nothing the Democrats or anybody else can do will reverse the trend. There's an alternative to the old obsession with progressivity and wealth redistribution: instead of Money Liberalism, why not try Civic Liberalism?

28 STANLEY KAUFFMANN **ON FILMS: IN THE BEGINNING** Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* is better now that it's shorter.

30 ROBERT BRUSTEIN **ON THEATER: WHAT MAKES A PLAY LIVE** The enduring excitement of *Baal*, the obsolete pieties of *The Grapes of Wrath*.

32 AMITAV GHOSH **THE HUMAN COMEDY IN CAIRO** The small, hidden, and moving world of Naguib Mahfouz's novels, and the quiet courage of their creator.

36 EUGEN WEBER **MALLS AND MARX** *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* by Susan Buck-Morss

37 BRUCE BOND **POEM** *Bach's Idiot Son*

39 ANDREW DELBANCO **HOLY TOLERANCE** *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* by Jon Butler

42 PEARL K. BELL **CANADA WRY** *Solomon Gursky Was Here* by Mordecai Richler

46 ROBERT WRIGHT **WASHINGTON DIARIST: TWIN PEAKS** What do *Newsweek*, *Time*, and David Lynch have in common?

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TRB®
FROM WASHINGTON

Are companies people?

The Supreme Court ruled a few weeks ago that states may forbid corporations to spend money in support of political candidates. This incited one of Justice Antonin Scalia's patented scintillating dissents, accusing his brethren of trampling on the First Amendment. That, in turn, gave several commentators the opportunity to quote at admiring length from the justice's fiery eloquence.

It may seem ungrateful to criticize any expression of Scalia's enthusiasm for the First Amendment (and not just because he is becoming God's gift to columnists). Liberals don't have many reasons to cheer the conservative judicial firebrand, but he was a key vote in support of last year's decision that free speech covers flag burning. Thanks to the cowardice of Congress, the Court will be dealing with that question again this spring, and we'd like the same answer, please. Nevertheless, when everyone from the ACLU to George Will is arrayed with him, it's worth struggling a bit more before succumbing to the tidal wave of Scalia's logic.

Fourteen years ago, dealing with the post-Watergate election reform law, the Court held that government cannot prevent you from spending your own money on behalf of your own or anybody else's candidacy. It properly rejected the notion that "money isn't speech." Although having more money gives some people a louder voice in the political debate, the First Amendment does not allow the government to suppress speech in an attempt to level the playing field. (The Court allowed limits on contributions to political campaigns, reasoning that these are not exercises of "speech," but it forbade any limits on "independent expenditures." A tenuous but reasonable distinction.)

But corporations are not people. In this year's case, the majority opinion (written by Thurgood Marshall) emphasizes that corporations enjoy certain economic advantages conferred by the state. The majority reasons that the state has the right to limit the potential political power unleashed by its own dispensations. Scalia says no. States hand out all sorts of advantages, even outright cash. "It is rudimentary that the State cannot exact as the price of those special advantages the forfeiture of First Amendment rights."

Corporations, however, are not merely beneficiaries of state largess. They are inventions of the state. "A corporation is an artificial being," wrote Justice John Marshall in 1819. "Being the mere creature of law, it possesses only those properties which the charter of creation confers upon it, either expressly, or as incidental to its very existence." The corporation evolved as an advantageous form in which to practice capitalism. Its chief advantage is limited liability: stockholders—unlike members of a partnership—are only at risk to the extent of their investment. This made it possible to raise vast amounts of money and create vast business enterprises. Society has benefited, generally. But surely the government can place limits on fictional "persons" of its own invention that it can't place on real, breathing people.

In limiting the political role of corporations, the state is not denying free speech to the corporation's owners, the stockholders. They are free to spend as much money as they want in pursuing their political goals. They can form an association to do it jointly. They merely cannot do it in the form of a corporation. Corporations used to be chartered for specific, narrowly defined purposes. Why can't they be chartered for "all legal purposes except for the promotion of political candidates"?

Well, there is the troubling question of the media. Newspapers, magazines, television networks are all corporations. As Scalia tartly notes, "Amassed corporate wealth that regularly sits astride the ordinary channels of information is much more likely" to influence the political debate "than amassed corporate wealth that is generally busy making money elsewhere." The Michigan law in question exempts the media, conveniently enough. But what if it didn't? Many of the great First Amendment triumphs of recent decades—protections against libel suits, prior restraints on publication, and so on—were won by media companies, not by individuals. Are they invalid?

In a 1978 case, Justice Rehnquist cited the passage from Marshall quoted above and argued that for a media corporation, unlike other corporations, freedom of speech is "incidental to its very existence." That's pretty clever, but not really good enough. Free speech is for everyone. Special privileges for "the media" would put the government in the business of deciding who "the media" is; it would create an official press. Perhaps there are other, more tenable distinctions between different kinds of First Amendment rights. Perhaps the Constitution does extend certain freedoms to the lone pamphleteer at his Xerox machine that it doesn't extend to IBM or even to Time Warner. Would that be so terrible? Take it away, *Harvard Law Review*. Or perhaps Scalia is right after all.

But Scalia is certainly wrong in suggesting that full-throated involvement of large corporations in the political debate is a good thing. He quotes Tocqueville about the need for some institution to replace the aristocracy as a powerful source of fresh political thinking: "associations ought, in democratic nations, to stand in lieu of those powerful private individuals whom the equality of conditions has swept away."

A century and a half later, "associations" are a big problem for our democracy. We suffer from interest-group gridlock: the ability of organized groups to thwart the best interests of society as a whole. Although every politician denounces "special interests" as if they were from Mars, these special interests in fact comprise most of the citizenry. That doesn't mean that—as New Deal liberals used to argue—the sum total of the special interests equals the general interest. The budget deficit is a concrete expression of the gulf between what serves us serially as special interests (farm price supports, the home mortgage interest deduction, and so on) and what would serve us better as fellow members of society (fiscal responsibility).

In fact, we're all members of not one but many overlapping interest groups. The trouble is that some of our variegated interests are represented more effectively than others, and the net effect may not serve any individual's interests at all—let alone those of society in general.

Most of us are corporate shareholders, at least through mutual funds and pension plans. Our interests as corporate shareholders are generally well represented through lobbying, vast public relations machinery, commercials on the Sunday news talk shows, and so on. Our interests as consumers, as creatures of the environment, as taxpayers are not usually so well represented. As taxpayers, we might not want to fork out for the new missile system that the corporation we own some shares in is so enthusiastic about. But efforts to protect our interests as corporate shareholders are organized, efficient, tax deductible. Efforts to protect our interests as taxpayers are likely to be none of the above.

In that sense, modern large corporations not only are not people: they're not even a very good stand-in for the people they allegedly speak for.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

MAY 7, 1990

BARRY'S FREE RIDE

Three months after Marion Barry got busted buying crack at the Vista International Hotel, the political comeback of the mayor of Washington is picking up team. Last week he was reported to have decided to run for a fourth term, and he is starting to raise campaign funds and attend candidate forums.

No one seriously doubts that the mayor was seriously involved with cocaine right up to the moment of his arrest. But there's a widespread feeling that it's unfair to keep bringing it up. Television journalists routinely accept as a condition for interviewing him that they not inquire into the touchy subject of his pending indictment, then ask him politely for his views on the city budget. *The Washington Post* runs an editorial criticizing his latest fiscal proposals without mentioning the cloud of crack smoke hanging over his head.

In the aftermath of the initial post-arrest shock, the city has been swept by a fire storm of indifference. Ministers have not taken to the pulpit to excoriate the appalling example he sets for the city's youth. City officials have not resigned in protest (though a few have quietly left). Crowds have not marched on the District Building to demand that the mayor step down. Partly as a result, opinion polls show that Barry stands a shockingly good chance of getting re-elected.

Barry has made shrewd, cynical use of the burgeoning culture of "recovery," making it seem as if his supposedly courageous effort to "deal" with his "substance abuse problem" amounts to an entitlement to public office. But the mayor's explanations and expressions of regret have grown fewer and more perfunctory since his return from treatment in Florida and South Carolina for alcohol and "prescription drug" abuse. He has not yet admitted using illegal drugs and has not apologized for his actions. He has used the cloak of religion shamelessly, alternately offering Christian prayers with Baptist ministers and Muslim ones with Louis Farrakhan. Most reprehensibly, Barry has used children, too. He has hit upon the strategy of making frequent, publicized visits to schools, ostensibly to guide the pupils in the ways of righteousness but actually to stage rituals that not-so-subtly turn personal forgiveness into political redemption—a distinction that is hard enough for adults, after all, to draw. The kids, subdued by peer pressure and by the exciting presence of a famous, self-assured authority figure, can be forgiven for failing to challenge their celebrity visitor. What is the grown-ups' excuse?

Like a good deal else in this city, the reasons so many people seem willing to gloss over Barry's colossal misdeeds divide along racial lines. For whites, the most significant reason is their fear of being tagged as racists. When Barry was arrested, black leaders, including NAACP director Benjamin Hooks, irresponsibly suggested that race was a factor in Barry's being targeted by the Justice Department. Though the accusation was without merit, few whites wished to risk implication in what blacks were being told was a plot against them. Even drug czar William Bennett, who is fairly free with his accusations of moral turpitude where advocates of drug legalization are concerned, has refrained from laying into Barry.

The second reason is that most whites see the mismanaged government of the District of Columbia as a black problem that has little effect on them. Few bureaucracies rival Washington's for inefficiency, corruption, and sheer bloat, but whites are largely insulated from the misery it causes. Most who work in Washington live in the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. But even many of those who live in D.C. have little contact with the city government beyond the yearly trauma of license plate renewal. They don't experience the public schools or housing projects firsthand. Few deign to participate in local politics.

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The lack of black outrage over Barry's behavior takes different forms and has different sources. Jesse Jackson would seem to have a special responsibility, not only because of his interest in the drug issue but also because he has chosen to make the District his political base and statehood for the District one of his principal political themes. Jackson has prayed for Barry but hasn't had the courage to utter a word of even anguished criticism. At April's convention of the National Conference of Black Mayors in New Orleans, Jackson, who was there to deliver a keynote address on drug policy, ostentatiously invited Barry to come up on the platform with him. The mayor got a standing ovation. Afterward he was mobbed by well-wishers and autograph-seekers. With unintended aptness, the mayor remarked that it was "frightening that people have been so supportive."

In the city's desultory political campaign, none of the mayor's five opponents (including one who is white) has chosen to take the risk of making an issue out of the fact that while crack was destroying the lives of thousands of city residents, the mayor was smoking the stuff. Only one of the candidates, Sharon Pratt Dixon, has called for his resignation. At a debate in March, the candidates made only the most veiled references to Barry's troubles. For the most part, Barry's challengers have hammered away at Walter Fauntroy, the District's delegate to the House of Representatives, for having taken the occasion of Barry's absence during treatment to declare his candidacy. Their timidity has been more than matched by the city's three black weeklies, which have been unanimous in their defense of Barry, telling their readers in article after article that he was "set up" by racist whites.

The general failure of Washington's black opinion leaders to call Barry to account is at once a cause and and effect of the general failure of black public opinion to do the same. The hard fact is that the messages Barry continues to send, especially to young blacks, have a genuine, and destructive, resonance in the minds of his hearers. What are those messages? That smoking crack is not the problem, getting caught is the problem; that crack use need cost you nothing if you play your cards right; that there is a massive white conspiracy against black public officials; that all blacks are hapless victims of a white racism that both explains and excuses any individual failure or wrongdoing; that evading responsibility is OK.

After missing his AA meetings last week the mayor excused himself by saying, "Marion Barry just screwed up a little bit from time to time." I'm no better than any of you, he seemed to be telling his constituents. This is false modesty, but its falseness is not of the usual kind. What he's really saying is: I'm no worse. Well, he is worse, and they are better; and they deserve better in the struggle against drugs, crime, poverty, broken families, infant mortality, AIDS, bad schools, inadequate housing, and the rest. Marion Barry has become a traveling advertisement for moral resignation and defeatism.

DOLEDRUMS

Bob Dole, the Senate Republican leader, seems to have adopted the curious policy of denouncing America's democratic allies and explaining away the atrocities of their adversaries. After a Holy Week swing through Arab capitals, Dole arrived in Jerusalem brimming with indignation. There's plenty to be indignant about in that part of the word, of course. The Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, for example: having used poison gas against Iraq's own Kurds and against Shiites within and without Iraq's borders, he now boasts of his willingness to use it to kill half the population of Israel (plus whatever Palestinians might be unlucky enough to be breathing the same air—a detail that has not prevented the Palestinian press from making a hero of him).

Dole's indignation, however, was directed against Israel. He called opposition to cutting U.S. aid to the Jewish state "selfishness." And he demanded the repeal of a Senate resolution acknowledging that Jerusalem "is and should remain the capital of Israel." Wait a minute, didn't he himself co-sponsor that resolution? Well, yes, he told NBC's Andrea Mitchell, but his co-sponsorship came as a surprise to him, though "somebody" authorized it. Anyhow, the resolution "was even cleared by the White House. And their attitude was it doesn't mean anything, but let's don't make a fight or it—let it go. And it doesn't mean anything. But it means a lot to the Arab countries, and of course it pleases the Israelis." So naturally it should be repealed, see? And what about Saddam Hussein, now in the midst of an armaments buying spree? (See "Sad damnation" by Morton Kondracke, page 9.) Sure, he's killed thousands of innocents, mostly women and children. "But," Dole told *The Jerusalem Post*, "I think we al have to recognize that it was during a period of the war between Iraq and Iran . . ." Gee, that's different. Never mind.

Dole also suggested that helping Israel settle Russian Jews would hurt the homeless back home. This is beyond mischief; it's malice. Even Dole must know that what the Bush administration is considering is a loan guarantee, not an appropriation. Since Israel has never defaulted or "rescheduled" a loan and is not about to start, this wouldn't cost the American taxpayer a penny.

What in the world is this man's grievance with Israel? His record offers no real clue, beyond his love of being disagreeable. He has never been especially moved by the suffering of the Palestinians. Could it be he's still sore that more American Jews didn't support his bid for the presidency? That would at least fit his character. Bad news for Israel (and American Jewry): with Dole a grudge can last a lifetime.

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NOTEBOOK

PULL THE PLUG: The following exchange took place on April 15 between EPA administrator Willliam K. Reilly and David Brinkley on ABC's "This Week":

BRINKLEY: Now, Mr. Reilly, there is an electric generating plant in Illinois that I have visited. It burns the cheapest, grubbiest coal you can buy, and I'm told it does not pollute. Are you familiar with that plant?

REILLY: No, sir, I am not.

BRINKLEY: It's in Decatur, Illinois.

REILLY: I come from Decatur, Illinois, where there is an electric utility that has a very different kind of plant.

BRINKLEY: Is it, as they say, non-polluting?

REILLY: No, I'm thinking of one that is on the list, in fact, one of the topmost [polluting plants] around.

BRINKLEY: Name it.

REILLY: It's the Baldwin plant.

BRINKLEY: Well, the one I'm talking about is owned by Archer Daniels Midland.

REILLY: Well, now, that's a different affair. That is not a public power plant.

BRINKLEY: But it's a power plant.

REILLY: I am familiar with that.

BRINKLEY: So my question is why aren't there more of them?

REILLY: I think there will be.

The next commercial was for Archer Daniels Midland.

GARBO DIES: The din of the eulogies for Greta Garbo is an irony, because the strength of their subject was silence—the most single-minded and exquisite-bodied silence in the history of the movies. There were no Louise-Brooksish late-in-life triumphal-glitzy comebacks for her. She was the rare human being who really *did* want to be alone. Yes, she talked ("Garbo Talks!" screamed the ads in 1930), in movies that were almost all as banal as the movies in which she was silent. Even in her talkies, however, Garbo was wrapped in stillness. She was world famous for her arousals of desire, but her theme was not precisely sex. It was eros. Unlike the other goddesses of the silent screen, Garbo did not confuse lust with hysteria; her eyes never popped; and it is worth recalling that in pictures without sound an inner life is harder to pull off. Surely there is no "sexier" scene in the movies than the epiphany at the inn in *Queen Christina*, the talkie in which Garbo, furtively alone with John Gilbert, inscribes the setting of her happiness in her memory by moving along the wall and touching all the objects in the room—not the man, the objects. The scene lasts whole minutes. This was not sex, it was an Olympian and tactile love of the world. Dietrich gabbed, wore garters, crashed through the boundaries of gender and played like men; Garbo materialized, resisted all revelation of herself, did not depend for her meaning and her beauty upon the power of discourse. Dietrich was a cultural comment; Garbo was a natural force. Dietrich cursed; Garbo blessed. Rest in peace. •

He makes Iraq a hard place.

SADDAMNATION

By Morton Kondracke

It's hard to think of a more evil and menacing tyrant anywhere in the world than Iraq's Saddam Hussein. He rules by murder, torture, and fear; he is developing an arsenal capable of multiple forms of mass destruction; he has violated U.S. and international laws; and he is bent on bullying his neighbors and bossing the Middle East. The obvious American strategy would be containment, obdurate resistance, and increased support for Hussein's potential victims, but so far the administration is set on a policy of—what else?—prudent diplomacy. "Privately, we haven't many compliments to pay to Iraq," one top White House official said. "Everybody knows the personal style of Saddam Hussein and how he's chosen to lead his country." But still, "We'd like to have better relations with Iraq. The president considers Saddam Hussein a bright, tough guy, but with a bad record on terrorism and Middle East tensions. We want to downplay our negative comments."

Hussein, of course, exhibits no such delicacy of feeling toward the United States. As late as 1980 he was calling the United States an "enemy" for supporting Israel. He changed his tune when he seemed to be losing the Iran-Iraq war, but since his victory, he seems to be reverting to his old policy. Iraqi agents were recently arrested for allegedly plotting the assassination of dissidents in the United States, and illegally acquired electronic capacitors for use in nuclear detonators or ballistic missiles have been intercepted. And on April 3 Hussein threatened to destroy half of Israel with chemical weapons if Israel attacks Iraq.

To this, President Bush replied blandly that "this is no time to be talking about using chemical or biological weapons. . . . I found those statements to be bad." The White House and State Department escalated the administration's characterizations to "deplorable and irresponsible" and "outrageous," but spokespersons Marlin Fitzwater and Margaret Tutweiler said that "the U.S.-Iraqi relationship is not being reassessed. . . . The whole relationship is not under review."

Other administration officials confirm this, but they say there has been a reconsideration of tactics—and that "a real split" has developed. Reportedly, the State Department bureaucracy and Undersecretary of State Robert Kimmitt want to demonstrate that Hussein cannot expect "business as usual" under current circumstances. They favor holding back $500 million in new agricultural credit guarantees and possibly blocking new Export-

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Import Bank loan guarantees if Iraq requests them. Such guarantees allow heavily indebted Iraq to get commercial loans at lower-than-normal interest rates to buy agricultural products and oil drilling equipment.

But even State's token slap reportedly is being resisted by the Agriculture Department on the grounds that Iraq buys $1 billion a year in U.S. agricultural products, including twenty-four percent of U.S. rice exports, which it won't do without Commodity Credit Corporation guarantees. After hearing Senator Robert Dole report on his visit to Iraq in mid-April, Bush was said to be "not anxious" to cut off credits. Opposition from the farm lobby helped defeat congressional attempts to impose sanctions on Iraq in 1988, after Hussein used poison gas to kill thousands of Kurdish civilians. Democratic Representative Howard Berman of California, who is sponsoring new sanctions legislation, has decided to avoid a fight with farmers and is seeking instead to bar sales of manufactured goods to Iraq.

According to administration officials, there almost certainly will be a stepped-up U.S. effort through international monitoring agencies to deny Iraq the equipment it needs to expand its chemical weapons arsenal and its ballistic missile force, and to develop biological and nuclear weapons. Top officials are convinced that Hussein is intent upon doing all of this, despite his denials on the biological and nuclear fronts and his 1988 pledges (amended April 3) to abide by the 1925 Geneva Protocol banning any use of chemical weapons. Most experts think there is not much chance of limiting Hussein's chemical arsenal, already the biggest in the Third World, or his force of several hundred modified Soviet Scud missiles, which he has cozily renamed al-Hussein. They think he still has no biological missile warheads and is five to ten years away from a nuclear attack capability.

At the moment experts doubt that Hussein would launch a chemical strike against Israel because Israel has far greater military power, including nuclear weapons, and could devastate Iraq. But he may have deterred Israel from launching another attack like the one in 1981 that destroyed his nuclear facility at Osirak. He thus gains the time to build up all his arsenals, which he can use to intimidate Iran and induce fellow Arab nations to make him leader of the Arab world. His April 3 threat was a hit even in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Administration officials confirm he has told Kuwait that Iraqi security may require him to occupy Kuwaiti territory in the future. Someday the Arabs conceivably could contemplate conventional war against Israel if Israel were deterred from using nuclear weapons.

The prospect of Saddam Hussein as top man in the Arab world and dominant power in the Persian Gulf is not one that civilized people should welcome. This man is a ruthless killer with a deep paranoia about the West and

A Man We Can Work With: A Sampler

"At the State Department . . . it is now almost a reflex action to label Hussein as a bluff artist, paranoid about internal dissent and so beholden to the Soviet Union as to be incapable of autonomous foreign policy, let alone the delicate task of coordinating inter-Arab economic and diplomatic objectives. In fact, Washington has seriously misjudged the man and underestimates the capabilities of his government." —Claudia Wright, *Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1979-80

". . . [I]t's hard to see any logic—other than political—behind some of America's current trade positions toward the Middle East. These policies seem premised on the notion that by obstructing trade with countries such as Iraq, the U.S. can force them to soften their stance toward Israel. This obviously hasn't been working, and it seems quite possible that the concept is flawed. The U.S. may stand a better long-run chance of softening Arab attitudes if it seeks to encourage greater contact with U.S. companies rather than isolation." —David Ignatius, *The Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 1981

"American policy-makers' erroneous, stereotyped image of Iraq as radical and pro-Soviet has delayed rapprochement between Baghdad and Washington. . . . In recent years, Iraq has probed for an improvement in relations with America." —Christine Helms, *The New York Times*, November 28, 1983

". . . [T]he Iranian revolution and seven years of bloody and inconclusive warfare have changed Iraq's view of its Arab neighbors, the United States, and even Israel. Iraq restored relations with the United States in November 1984. Its leaders no longer consider the Palestinian issue their problem. Iraq's allies since 1979 have been those states—Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco—most threatened by revolutionary upheaval, most friendly to the United States, and most open to negotiations with Israel. These allies have forced a degree of moderation on Iraq, as Baghdad's silence about the recent meeting between Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres conspicuously showed. Iraq is now the de facto protector of the regional status quo. Iran the revolutionary state is more likely to turn its weapons against Israel." —Daniel Pipes and Laurie Mylroie, THE NEW REPUBLIC, April 27, 1987

"The secretary of state and Congress are certainly right in seeking to halt the spread of gas warfare. But Iraq, having put down the Kurdish rebellion, currently has no wars on its agenda, and it has pledged to abide by the Geneva Convention in the future. Now is the time for diplomacy, to strengthen the barriers against gas warfare, which is why the State Department objects to Congress's proposed sanction. They are unitive measures that will have no impact on the spread of lethal gas while doing harm to both the United States and Iraq." —Milton Viorst, *The Washington Post*, October 5, 1988

"Iraq is an important state with great potential. We want to deepen and broaden our relationship." —Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs John Kelly, speech at the annual dinner of the Middle East Institute, Washington, D.C., October 27, 1989

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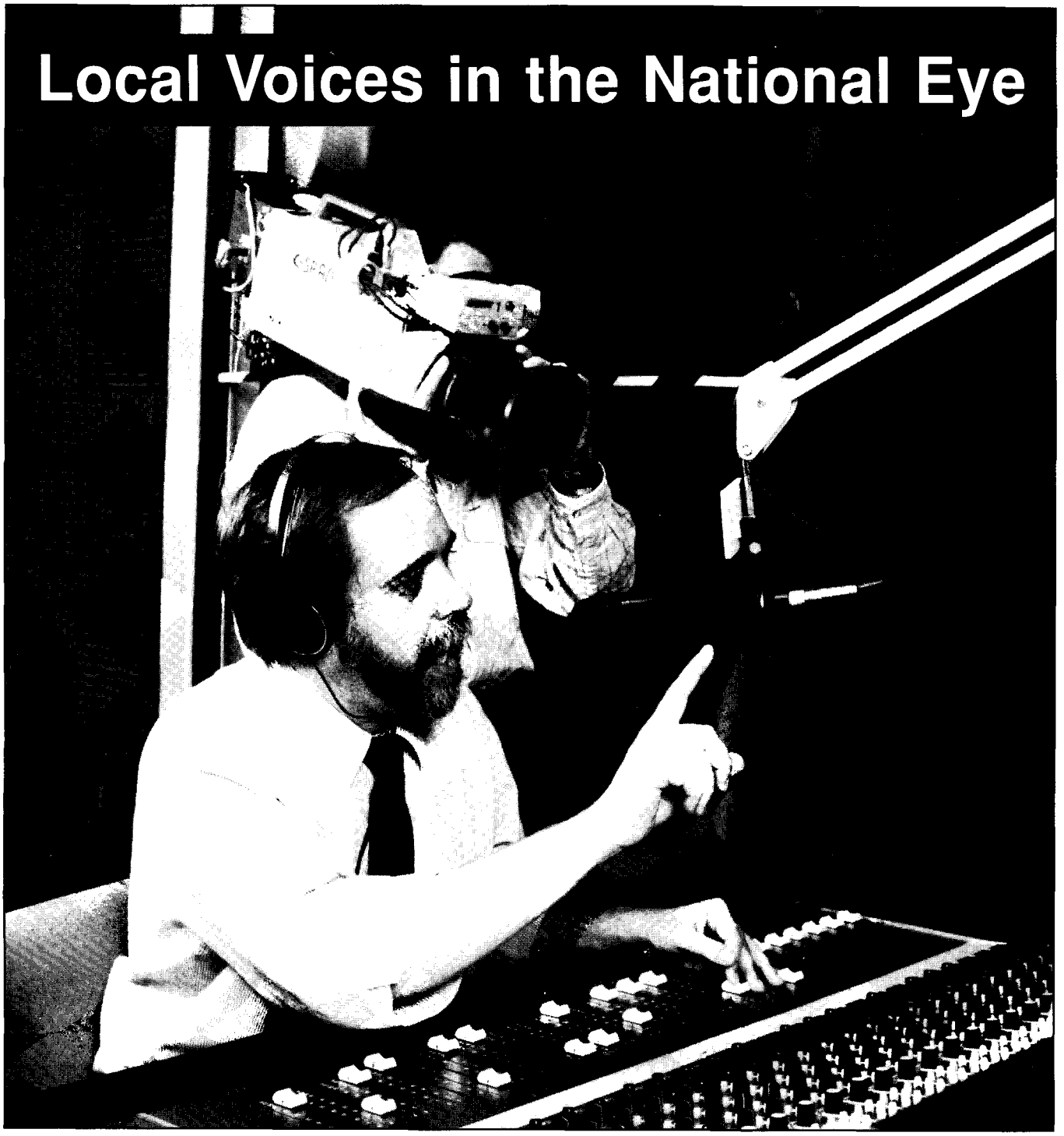
Local Voices in the National Eye



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grandiose ambitions to be a new Nasser and to re-create the glories that were Babylon and Mesopotamia. Experts say Hussein is neither demented like Muammar Qaddafi nor dependent like Syria's Hafez Assad, but shrewd and potentially powerful. Iraq has the second-largest oil reserves in the free world, a battle-hardened army of a million men, and a totalitarian political system. Now fifty-three, Hussein was a conspirator at age twenty-two in an unsuccessful assassination attempt against then-ruler Abt al-Karim Qassem. At thirty-one he became the No. 2 man in the country (and chief of political purges), and he has been absolute ruler since 1979. He is president of the country, chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, secretary general of the Regional Command, prime minister, commander in chief of the armed forces, and the object of a massive personality cult.

Middle East scholar Barry Rubin says that a joke in Iraq goes, "What's the population of Iraq? Answer, 30 million: 15 million people and 15 million pictures of Saddam Hussein." Except people are jailed and tortured for telling jokes about Saddam Hussein. He rules through the Baath party, to which all aspiring persons must belong, plus several police state agencies that are entitled to arrest people at will and carry out executions without public trial. All newspapers and radio and TV stations are controlled by the state, and the TV news begins each evening with a song that goes, "Oh Saddam, our victorious / Oh, Saddam, our beloved / You carry the nation's dawn between your eyes . . ." Rubin says that the regime is modeled on Stalin's, and so is Hussein's mustache. Stalin is Hussein's hero.

In a newly published book, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq*, Iraqi expatriate scholar Samir al-Khalil attributes much of his country's political culture to Hussein's determination not to be overthrown by Western imperialists. The regime views all opposition as treason, according to al-Khalil, hence "police work logically became the substitute for all of politics." In a blistering report in February, the human rights group Middle East Watch declared that since the 1970s Hussein's victims have included conservatives, liberals, non-Baath Arab nationalists, Communists, Shiites, Kurds, Assyrian Christians, students, intellectuals, military personnel, even Baath party members and senior officials of the regime. A million Iraqis have been forced into exile, and all domestic opposition has been silenced through torture, terror, execution, and imprisonment. The State Department reported last month that Iraq's human rights record for 1989 "remained abysmal."

The April 3 speech in which Saddam Hussein threatened to destroy Israel also demonstrates that paranoia about Western imperialists still grips him. Even though he launched the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 and even though the United States tilted in his direction and against Iran, Hussein claimed that the war really was part of a "big conspiracy" by the United States, Britain, and Israel to undermine Iraq. "The main players . . . during the war used to play the game through Iran, but now they have no choice but to play the game themselves. The big ones therefore are now playing the game directly." Part of the conspiracy, he said, is to offer Iraq nuclear weapons and try to entrap it into buying them. Iraq claims its attempted purchase of capacitors was for a university research laser. It does not explain why it tried to obtain them illegally through a front company.

Hussein cut off all relations with the United States after Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War and vowed not to renew them "so long as the United States is occupying our land through the Zionist entity." However, he changed his mind in 1982, when the war was going badly. He expelled terrorist Abu Nidal (while continuing to provide a haven for Abu Abbas, perpetrator of the *Achille Lauro* hijacking) and even hinted that he was willing to live in peace with Israel. Diplomatic relations were re-established in 1984, and Hussein sent to Washington one of the most effective ambassadors of recent history, Nizar Hamdoon, who managed to convince scholars, journalists, and politicians that Iraq might become a new U.S. "bulwark" in the Persian Gulf (see "A Man We Can Work With," page 10).

The Bush administration, reviewing Gulf policy in 1989, decided it would try to improve relations with Iraq and doubled agricultural loan guarantees. "This is a guy we have to deal with," a top administration official said. "His country is one we have to deal with, but we will do it in conformity with our interests and will state our views directly, consistently, and firmly." The administration considers Iraq an "emerging regional power" on a par with India, Brazil, Pakistan, and Vietnam. "Potentially, it's a big problem," said one official, "but it also could be seen positively."

Administration officials say Iraq has supported PLO chairman Yasir Arafat's participation in the Mideast peace process and sponsored Egypt's readmission to the Arab fold. "At the end of the day, if we've got to confront a hostile Iraq, so be it," said one ranking official, "but if we can avoid that, we'd view it as a success. That's the challenge." So, in reaction to the latest provocations, the administration has restricted itself to mild public statements and, it says, frank diplomatic demarches delivered through Dole and U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie. Bush is said to believe that Saddam Hussein feels conspired against and is not eager to make him feel more so.

There does not appear to be any administration fallback strategy in case Hussein proves not to be "manageable." At a minimum, the United States ought to be applying balance-of-power principles to the region, bolstering potential Iraqi victims—Israel, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia—and hinting at possible improvements of relations with Hussein's archenemies, Syria and Iran. The administration also ought to be warning that violations of U.S. law and international agreements are unacceptable and will be met with a concerted U.S. effort to expose, isolate, and punish Iraq in international forums. Right now, George Bush is trying to soothe Hussein's paranoia and temper his megalomania. It's not likely to work. •

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THE DRINK LINK

By Robert Bazell

From the "demon rum" campaigns of the nineteenth century to today's freeway billboards soliciting customers for expensive treatment programs, America has seldom enjoyed a comfortable relationship with alcohol. The recent report of a gene "significantly associated with alcoholism" is unlikely to make it easier. The scientific conclusions are tenuous at best, and the manner in which they were presented shows how medical research can be contorted to satisfy social demands.

The idea that alcoholism is a disease that for inherent reasons threatens some people more than others originated with the Alcoholics Anonymous movement after the repeal of Prohibition. Though the notion gained enormous popular support, it had little basis in scientific observation. For years medical researchers have been searching for facts to justify the belief. Like many areas of biomedical research, these efforts recently have focused on genetics.

Alcoholism runs in families, but that says nothing about the nature-nurture question. A number of studies have suggested that there could be an inherited predisposition to alcoholism. These include identification of strains of rats that drink more alcohol than other strains, observations of identical twins reared apart, and comparisons of the metabolism of alcohol in people whose parents were alcoholics with people whose parents were not. But none of these studies was by itself conclusive, and many scientists have believed that the issue could be resolved only by finding specific genes, pieces of information on the chromosome, which could lead to alcoholism. That was precisely what Kenneth Blum and Ernest Noble reported they had found.

Alas, Blum and Noble have not located the smoking gun. Despite the best intentions, they and their coworkers carried out a study marred by dubious methodology and unwarranted conclusions. But their findings were too appealing not to trumpet to the world. Because so many people want to believe that a tiny bit of DNA inherited from one or both parents can open the door to the devastation of alcohol, *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*), the two researchers, and their universities were able to portray the study as far more important than it is. As Dr. Paul Billings of the Harvard Medical School, who directs the Clinic for Inherited Disease at New England Deaconess Hospital, pointed out: "If this type of genetic analysis was carried out for a disease or a behavior less attractive than alcoholism, it would never get published. It tells you nothing of significance."

Studying the brains of seventy dead people, half alcoholics and half not, Blum and Noble looked for the presence of a particular gene. The gene is common. One out of four Americans carries it. Brain scientists believe it is responsible for part of the "reward" system that makes the brain feel good about activities in other parts of the body. Blum and Noble found the gene in seventy-seven percent of the alcoholics and twenty-eight percent of the non-alcoholics. Among the problems with the research are that the sample size is very small and that there is little reason to think that this gene has anything to do with alcoholism. The gene is so common it is possible that it occurs at three times the normal frequency in any group scientists might choose to look at: compulsive gamblers, tomato growers, or readers of THE NEW REPUBLIC, for example. "The study," says Billings, "is from the genetic dark ages."

Scientists often complain that journalists misrepresent their work, and especially that they fail to report caveats of uncertainty. So it is worth noting just how this research was presented to reporters. *JAMA* featured the study as the lead article in its April 18 edition. (This was three weeks after *JAMA* pushed back its publication day so that reports from *JAMA* would appear in the popular media a day ahead of those from its chief competitor, *The New England Journal of Medicine*.) For reporters who might not read their advance copies of *JAMA*, the AMA sent out press releases that began, "For the first time, researchers have evidence of a specific gene that may play a crucial role in causing the disease of alcoholism." The AMA's weekly "video news release," transmitted free by satellite to all the television stations in the country, featured a report including interviews with Blum and Noble and a video of their laboratories. The video news release includes a narration from the AMA that the local station is free to broadcast or to replace with the voice of one its own reporters.

In the same issue, *JAMA* also carried an editorial written by Dr. Enoch Goris, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, and three colleagues pointing out that Blum and Noble's research "must be regarded with caution." The editorial detailed a series of technical questions about the research, including the warning that such "research often hinges on subtle, complex, and often controversial statistical considerations." But such subtleties are almost always lost in a wave of publicity.

Blum works at the University of Texas Health Sciences Center in San Antonio, Noble at UCLA Medical Center. After a brief discussion, the two universities' press offices decided the two scientists should be made available to reporters in Los Angeles rather than in San Antonio, assuring much wider coverage. UCLA printed up a glossy press package, scheduled a press conference, and lined up individual interviews with most national news organizations.

The researchers began most of their discussions with reporters with the appropriate warnings, including the

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one that all scientific findings must be confirmed by others. But they were quick to boast of what they believe they've accomplished. "Assuming all of this holds up to be true," Noble told me, "it means that we now have the potential of drawing blood samples from people and looking to see if they have a predisposition to alcoholism." Blum added that "this understanding of the genetics of alcoholism could lead to better treatments."

A blood test that would identify a quarter of the American population as potential alcoholics would create profound ethical dilemmas. In addition to the personal anguish, a person testing positive might be denied a job or insurance. And with any genetic test the question arises: What can be done for those who test positive? It is by no means clear that a simple admonition to avoid drinking alcohol would be much help. As for better treatments, it might help to recall that for most diseases, discovery of the true genetic cause has not led to treatments. Scientists have understood the genetics of sickle cell anemia for two decades and there is still no treatment.

Another question about Blum and Noble's work is, why did they study brains? Genes appear in every cell of the body. Almost all genetic research is carried out with blood samples from living people, not brains or other organs of the dead. Noble had been working with this set of seventy brains for almost seven years, searching for differences in brain chemistry between alcoholics and non-alcoholics. Those endeavors had met with little success, but Noble continued because, he said, "I was sure of the diagnosis." Each of the seventy individuals had been subjected to what is called a "psychological autopsy." Researchers pored over the medical records of the deceased and interviewed relatives to be certain who was an alcoholic and who was not. The thirty-five in the study called alcoholics were almost all what Noble classifies as "virulent" alcoholics. Many died of cirrhosis. But the need for this rigorous methodology points to one of the profound difficulties of alcoholism research: the definitions of alcoholism and alcohol abuse shift continually.

In the past few years scientists have found either the approximate or precise location of the genes for several diseases, including Huntington's, Duchenne muscular dystrophy, polycystic kidney disease, and cystic fibrosis. These discoveries have already led to clinical tests to determine whether a person is a carrier of the disease. At the same time other groups have claimed to have found the gene for manic depressive illness, schizophrenia, and Alzheimer's disease. But the claims for the last three conditions either have been retracted or are being challenged seriously by other scientists. A major reason for the success in finding genes for physical diseases and the failures with mental ones is that mental conditions are far more difficult to diagnose. The set of behaviors labeled as alcoholism presents an even more difficult target, making it that much less likely that anyone will soon discover its genetic underpinnings.

Common sense tells us that alcoholism, like almost everything in life, results from a combination of genetics and environment. It is surely possible that people can inherit a gene—or, far more likely, several genes—that puts them at greater risk of becoming alcoholics. But the possibilities that genetic studies will yield more effective treatments or methods of prevention anytime soon are remote. And scientists and lay people should remain skeptical of any claims to the contrary, no matter how much they may wish them to be true.

ROBERT BAZELL is science correspondent for NBC News.

Shintaro Ishihara, hyper-nationalist.

TOKYO'S DR. NO

By Clay Chandler

TOKYO

On a summer afternoon in 1946, a Japanese junior high school student in the coastal town of Zushi decided he'd had it with the way people in his community cowered before soldiers of the U.S. Occupation. Approached on his way home from school by three American GIs sucking popsicles as they walked through the local marketplace, the youth refused to step aside to allow the "new conquerors" to pass. "As I was about to pass them," he recalled in an essay written years later, "the one closest to me suddenly struck me on the cheek with his stick ice. I walked on as though nothing had happened, ignoring the fact that I had been struck. I still remember the feeling of pride I had as the townspeople watched me with baited breath."

Throughout the next four decades the schoolboy from Zushi, Shintaro Ishihara, became one of his nation's most popular novelists and best-known politicians. Now a senior member of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, he has emerged as a strident critic of U.S. military and economic policies; standing up to Americans still seems to give him a rush. When he took his opinions to Washington last January, the Americans, including such trade hard-liners as Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher and Representatives Richard Gephardt and Sander Levin, were polite enough not to throw popsicles. But no one seemed particularly taken with his views. Now, fresh from a recent election in which Japanese voters enthusiastically returned him to parliament, Ishihara has planned a second visit in late May. He may find that U.S. antagonism toward Japan has eased somewhat in the wake of the recent trade talks. But the plucky legislator may be surprised to learn that this faint warming in U.S.-Japan relations does not extend to him personally.

Ishihara has been persona non grata in the United States since last fall, when a bootleg translation of some

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bluntly worded speeches he delivered with Sony chairman Akio Morita began circulating in Washington. The speeches appeared in Japanese bookstores in January 1989 under the title *The Japan That Can Say No* and leapt quickly to the top of the nation's best-seller list. They attack U.S. trade and security policies as arrogant and shortsighted, and argue that Japan's political leaders should stop letting Americans push them around. American reaction to Ishihara's remarks ranged from indignation to apoplexy. Congressional leaders decried Ishihara as a reactionary and misinformed America-basher. Chrysler president Lee Iacocca denounced Ishihara regularly in speeches. *The Wall Street Journal* called him "Shintaro Gephardt."

Ishihara blames much of the fuss over his comments in *Say No* on the inferior quality of the pirated translation. He says the bootleg version, hastily rendered into English by gnomes at the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and later entered into the Congressional Record by Levin, is "filled with mistakes, intentional distortions, and deliberate omissions." Ishihara also complains that wide circulation of the Pentagon's version deprived him of thousands of dollars in U.S. royalties. But in February he negotiated a deal with Simon and Schuster to publish his own English-language volume, scheduled for release next January. (Sony's Morita, still smarting over the negative publicity his firm received in the United States after its acquisition of CBS Records, balked at the idea of publishing an English translation.) In a recent television appearance, Ishihara claimed that Simon and Schuster had offered him an advance of $300,000, believed to be the largest sum ever awarded to a Japanese author by a non-Japanese publisher. A spokesman for Simon and Schuster said the $300,000 figure was "not correct" but declined to specify the actual amount of the advance.

The book will bear the same title as the original but will not contain exact translations of his speeches. Instead, Ishihara plans to "amplify and expand" on the ideas he articulated in the original, according to his editor at Simon and Schuster, Fred Hill. Ishihara is still working on the manuscript, but Simon and Schuster publicists vehemently deny suggestions that the author plans to sanitize his comments for foreign readers.

In the *Say No* speeches, Ishihara characterizes America's dealings with Japan as racist and charges that the United States dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki but not Berlin or Düsseldorf because Germans are white and Japanese aren't. He denounces former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone as Ronald Reagan's lapdog and complains bitterly about the terms of Japan's agreement to buy technology for its new FSX fighter planes from the United States. He also advocates abrogating the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty—"The time has come for Japan to tell the U.S. that we do not need American protection"—and urges Japan to consider tipping the international balance of power by selling semiconductors to the Soviets.

If his American detractors thought their criticisms would prompt him to tone down his rhetoric, they must be disappointed. Within days of returning from Washington, Ishihara—who has made a career out of turning controversy to his advantage—was hammering *Say No*'s themes harder than ever. The book already has sold more than a million copies in Japan and remains one of the nation's best sellers. "Japanese readers hear that my book has been criticized in America, so they buy it to find out what I said that was so terrible," he explained with a smile. "Then they read it and think, 'You must be joking!' And it only sells more."

When his book finally appears in U.S. bookstores, American readers are likely to find his positions on trade issues surprisingly palatable. He frankly acknowledges that there are many instances in which Japan should say "yes" to the United States and "no" to its own domestic interest groups. He blasts Japan's construction industry for conspiring to jack up the price of building new highways. He wants Japanese workers to take more leisure time and advocates across-the-board deregulation of consumer goods, including rice. He is particularly eager for Japan to liberalize restrictions on U.S. telecommunications products. Mobile phones developed by Japan's NTT are of such poor quality (and thus more susceptible to being tapped), he jokes, that his colleagues in the Diet "don't dare use them to call their mistresses for fear of being tapped and blackmailed by *yakuza* [the Japanese equivalent of the mafia]."

Americans may have less sympathy for Ishihara's assessment of their racial prejudices. In the *Say No* speeches, he asserts that Americans have an unwarranted "superiority complex" toward non-white nations and argues that rising anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States reflects deeply rooted bigotry more than dissatisfaction with unfair Japanese trade practices. "If a country like Germany or England or Australia had Japan's economic status," he claims, "there wouldn't be nearly as much friction between America and that country as there is between America and Japan."

Ishihara insists his own comments on race have been quoted out of context by the American media, but in an interview he was hard-pressed to show which statements have been misrepresented. And some of Ishihara's attempts to clarify his views only led him to curious new blunders. At one point he tried to affirm his open-mindedness with the observation that American blacks are superior to African blacks because they have been able to intermingle with whites. "You can search the entire African continent," he said, "and not find a woman as beautiful as Florence Joyner."

Ishihara's disdain for white supremacy suffuses his larger vision for the future of Japanese foreign policy. Japan, in his view, must abandon its subservient relationship with America and the West in favor of a more independent approach that recognizes the nation's potential for economic and political leadership in Asia. He concedes that bringing about this transition will not be easy. "No one wants to take the trouble to redefine the U.S.-Japan relationship,"

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he says. "The Japanese government knows that most of what America says is unreasonable, but it listens anyway because no one wants to make waves."

Ishihara obviously has no such compunctions, which adds to his extraordinary personal appeal. He was elected to the Diet in 1968 by the widest margin in the history of the Upper House. A recent public opinion poll found him second to only Socialist Party chairwoman Takako Doi as the nation's most popular politician. Some political analysts believe that if the nation's chief executive were chosen directly by voters rather than by members of the Diet, Ishihara might be Japan's next prime minister.

The son of a wealthy shipping merchant, Ishihara has surrounded himself with a sort of Japanese Camelot. He has a beautiful wife and lives in a large house in Denenchofu, one of Tokyo's toniest suburbs. He has four handsome sons, one of whom is married to a famous actress and was elected in February to a seat in the Lower House. Ishihara's younger brother Yujiro was one of Japan's best-loved actors; when he died of cancer two years ago, Yujiro left survivors a fortune of more than $130 million.

Ishihara is an avid yachtsman, tennis player, and scuba diver. His adventures and athletic exploits are frequently chronicled in Japan's popular press. In 1973, for example, he led a group of Japanese explorers to Scotland on a fruitless, but highly publicized, search for the Loch Ness monster.

And the Ishihara mystique transcends money and machismo. Before turning to politics, he was one of Japan's most successful authors. He became a national celebrity in 1956 with the publication of his first novel, *Season of the Sun*, which depicts a group of affluent youths who spurn both Confucian tradition and the pessimism of the post-Occupation era. The book sold more than 270,000 copies in its first year and earned the then twenty-four-year-old Ishihara the Akutagawa Prize, Japan's most prestigious literary honor.

The popularity of *Season of the Sun* transformed Ishihara into something of a cult hero in Japan. Soon after the book's publication, millions of young Japanese donned sunglasses and garish Hawaiian shirts and headed for the beach in emulation of its characters. Male members of the "sun tribe," as devotees of this new ethos came to be called, wore their hair in a "*Shintaro-gari*," the crew-cut style favored by Ishihara and his friends.

In the wake of *Season of the Sun*'s success, Ishihara churned out a series of popular novels, short stories, and screenplays. He directed many of the films himself, and his brother achieved stardom as a result of his appearances in the early productions. Ishihara has written more than fifty novels; most have been best sellers. His early works—which bear titles such as *Young Beast*, *Crazed Fruit*, *Room of Punishment*, and *Museum of Death*—are noted for their graphic descriptions of violence and sex, and celebrate un-Japanese virtues such as individualism and indulgence.

Ishihara continues to write fiction despite his duties in parliament and likes to compare his skills as author and politician to those of Benjamin Disraeli. His recent books are complex and cerebral. *Survival*, his latest effort, tells the story of a successful entrepreneur who wages a protracted and solitary battle with cancer at an isolated seaside retreat and returns to his former life only to discover that friends and family had presumed him dead and wish that he had remained so. When *Survival* appeared in 1988, it was hailed by some of Japan's most prominent literary critics as the year's best novel.

During his twenty-two years in politics, Ishihara has never shied from confrontation. He took on the Japan Sumo Association during his first term in the Diet. The organization threatened to sue him for libel after he wrote an article alleging that one of the year's most important sumo matches had been fixed. The suit was later dropped. In 1974 he won the dubious distinction of becoming the first Diet member to be sued by a colleague. The action was prompted by an article Ishihara wrote for a national tabloid accusing an unnamed LDP faction leader of dipping into party campaign funds to pay off a debt owed a relative. That suit, too, was dropped.

Ishihara's swashbuckling personal style has not endeared him to LDP regulars. He angered party bosses in 1972 when he decided to campaign against an eight-term LDP veteran for a seat in the more powerful Lower House. When LDP power brokers refused to sanction his candidacy, Ishihara quit the party and ran as an independent. The party reluctantly accepted him back into the fold after he easily defeated the incumbent.

His seniority has earned him Cabinet assignments, and in 1975 he won grudging admiration from some party leaders for his unsuccessful bid to unseat Tokyo's popular socialist governor. But the LDP's elder statesmen have stubbornly refused him admission to the party's inner circle of power, and there is little likelihood that they will appoint him to positions of real influence in the future. Last summer Ishihara further alienated them when he ran for the prime ministership. His candidacy drew extensive attention in the media but ultimately failed to win votes from more than fifty of his 511 Lower House colleagues. In October Ishihara organized a dozen of his supporters in the Diet into an informal "study group." Some interpret the move as preparation for another quixotic run at the premiership.

If Ishihara shows up on U.S. television in his next visit, Americans will almost certainly disagree with his politics. But they may find something about his manner strangely appealing. For though he has risen to prominence in a nation where the political system is dominated by backstage manipulators who seem obsessed with preserving the appearance of harmony, Ishihara has remained an individualist. He says what he thinks, does what he likes, and doesn't take any guff. He acts almost, well, American.

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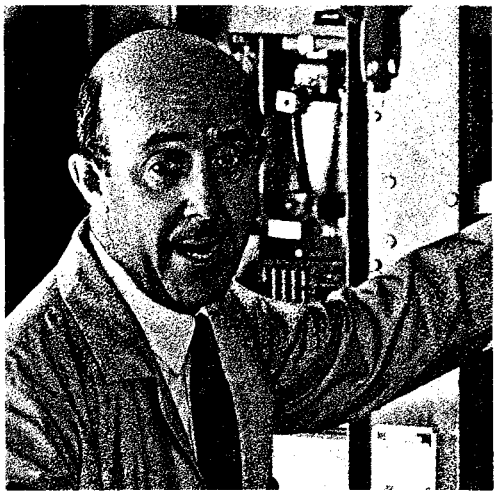

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FOR A NEW EQUALITY

By Mickey Kaus

Read their lips: "progressivity." So desperate are the Democrats that they threaten to resort to principle, in this case the venerable liberal principle that the richer you are the more of your income should be paid in taxes. In the Senate, Daniel Patrick Moynihan proposes to cut the Social Security payroll tax, largely on the grounds that it's not progressive. In the House, Majority Leader Richard Gephardt unfurls charts showing that even the progressive income tax has become less so since 1980. "We should measure every bill that comes before us by whether it adds to the regressivity of the tax code," declares Representative Don Pease, a Democrat on the Ways and Means Committee. "You cannot lose by discussing this issue if you're a Democrat or a fair person," says Mario Cuomo.

There's a reason why calculating, ambitious Democrats make a fuss about progressivity: they think it's the right thing to do. Their identity is at stake. What's a Democrat (or at any rate a liberal Democrat) if *not* someone who wants taxes to be progressive, who wants to aid poorer Americans at the expense of richer Americans? If the Democrats don't push for progressivity in the coming debates, the argument goes, there won't be any debate. Who needs two Republican parties?

Well, nobody. But before Democrats invest too heavily in a progressivity crusade, they should take a deep breath and maybe walk around the block once or twice. If they still think it's a good idea, they should think some more. The problem isn't that "progressivity" won't sell (though it probably won't). Nor is it that the campaign may actually backfire (though it might). And it isn't that progressivity isn't the right thing to do.

The problem is progressivity's purpose—or, rather, purposes. The progressive urge (it's almost a tic) actually serves two distinct liberal strategies, and today's liberals are almost certain to pursue the wrong one. That strategy, which I'll call Money Liberalism, would condemn the Democrats to a futile and often incoherent struggle against the basic forces of our economy. The second, less familiar strategy is not futile—in fact I think it is the only way liberals can hope to achieve their basic goals. But it's a strategy in which the pursuit of progressivity plays a relatively minor role.

When it comes to justifying progressivity, economists have long distinguished between two sorts of arguments. One is based on the idea of "equal sacrifice." The goal here is to share the burden of taxes evenly. Taxing rich and poor an equal percentage of their incomes won't accomplish this, the argument goes. A dollar means much more to a poor person. What's more, the rich should bear fiscal pain in proportion to their fiscal pleasure. Suppose we decide to burden taxpayers by taking away twenty percent of the satisfaction each gets from his or her money. For a man making $10,000, to whom every dollar counts, that might mean a tax of about twenty percent. To someone making a million, the dollars that the state is taking are gravy. He didn't need that second swimming pool anyway. We have to tax away much more than twenty percent of his dollars if we want to tax away twenty percent of his pleasure. Hence progressivity.

This is a persuasive (to me, anyway) argument for progressive taxes. It's the leading candidate for what people mean when they talk about taxing on the basis of "ability to pay." And it may be all that Democrats such as Cuomo mean by tax "fairness." But it's not what many liberal Democrats mean. The distinctive feature of "sacrifice theory" is that it accepts the pre-tax distribution of income. All it does is try to allot evenly the pain of paying for government. After taxes are paid, and all the sacrifices borne, the remaining distribution of income might still be wildly unequal. Sacrifice theory doesn't care. Plenty of liberal Democrats do care. They value progressive taxation precisely as a tool to change the income distribution in the direction of more equality.

In practice, the two arguments are harder to disentangle. Partly that's because the progressivity that might be supported on income-equalizing grounds can also be supported on the less controversial grounds of equal sacrifice. Politicians (Mondale and Dukakis come to mind) quickly learn to wallow in this ambiguity—supporting progressivity in the name of "ability to pay" without renouncing its redistributive effects or the moral glow that comes with them. One tax scholar of the 1920s summarized the disingenuous relationship of progressivity and redistribution by cracking, "We have all heard that it is wrong to marry for money, but quite praiseworthy to marry where money happens to be."

But there's no point repressing the ancient desire of liberals to make incomes more equal. To pick an ob-

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scure example, the 1976 Democratic platform pledges "a government that will be committed to a fairer distribution of wealth, income, and power." Redistribution is also the clear goal of contemporary liberal writers, such as Thomas Byrne Edsall, Tom Wicker, or TNR's Robert Kuttner and Michael Kinsley, who don't have to fudge like politicians. "Would that ordinary people might simply grow indignant at the gross inequality of American society and organize for progressive change," writes Kuttner, somewhat plaintively.

This broad redistributionist strain of Democratic politics is Money Liberalism. Money is what it seeks to equalize, or at least to render "more equal"—by both raising incomes at the bottom and restraining them at the top. Despite the bullying conservative atmosphere of recent years (when mention of even "ability to pay" will get you accused of fomenting "class warfare"), Money Liberalism is likely to play an increasingly prominent role in Democratic politics.

The reason has nothing to do with Jesse Jackson's influence or activist domination of the Iowa caucuses. It has everything to do with a basic economic fact of our time: incomes, always unequal, are growing more so. Nobody disputes this anymore. A cottage industry of skeptics once made a living debunking each new report of rising income inequality, but they found themselves rather too busy.

The clincher was a 1989 study by the House Ways and Means Committee. Unlike some earlier surveys, this one looked at unattached individuals as well as families. It adopted a new price index that didn't overstate inflation. And it showed that, between 1973 and 1987, the share of national income claimed by the bottom fifth of the population dropped from 5.6 percent to 4.3 percent. The next-to-bottom fifth and even the middle fifth also saw their share fall. Meanwhile, the share of the top two-fifths jumped, with the top quintile moving up from 41.4 percent to 43.9 percent. That's not even counting capital gains, a key source of wealth for the top tier during the stock market and real estate booms of the eighties.

Three things immediately need to be said about this inegalitarian trend. First, Reagan's tax cuts can't be blamed. The data measure income *before* taxes. (In fact, the inequality trend begins in the mid-1970s, when Reagan was nowhere near Washington.) Second, the trend does not reflect merely the much-discussed growth of a single-parent "underclass." Income inequality is growing among married couples with children and among full-time workers. The disparity is caused as much by middle-class Americans moving up as by Americans moving down. Finally, all this doesn't mean the middle class is disappearing. Most families are still in the $20,000-$55,000 range. The "bell curve" of income is safely bell-shaped. But it's a flatter bell, with more people at the extremes.

The inequality trend will inevitably intensify the appeal of Money Liberalism for Democrats. Even if they don't blame Reagan, they can make this very powerful argument: during the glory decades following World War II, American incomes were getting more equal. But now, for whatever reason, we seem to be slipping backward. Why not do something about it? Robert B. Reich urges Democrats to tell a "populist" story, in which "we advocate a progressive income tax, reining in Wall Street, and we talk about the wealthy getting wealthier and the poor getting poorer." Republican strategist Kevin Phillips's latest book is all about how inequality of wealth gives populist Democrats a great opportunity. *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* now routinely begin editorials with sentences like, "At a time when income inequality is already rising in America . . ."

If "progressivity" becomes part of a renewed push for redistribution, is that such a bad thing? What's wrong with Money Liberalism? Begin by imagining how the Democrats will sell it. A preview was afforded by House Speaker Thomas Foley's response to the last State of the Union address. Foley sounded the progressivity theme and came close to endorsing redistribution. But he put the issue in a particular way. Opposing Bush's capital gains tax-break (which Foley accurately said would benefit mainly the rich), he pledged to "restore IRAs" for the "middle class," and to "make sure that the greatest part of any tax cut, of any kind, goes to those of you who live on a paycheck. . . . The issue goes to the heart of the reason we are Democrats: above all we stand with you, the people who go to work and pay the taxes."

This is egalitarianism packaged as interest group politics. The idea seems to be that redistribution equals reelection, because the bottom fifty-one percent will outvote the top forty-nine percent—or perhaps, in Foley's more expansive appeal, because the bottom seventy percent will outvote the top thirty percent. The catch, of course, is that this equation can run the other way. The top seventy percent can be mobilized to beat the bottom thirty percent. That sort of "top-down" coalition, as Edsall labeled it, recently produced the debacle of "catastrophic" health care. Democrats designed a program financed by surcharge on the richest forty percent of the elderly. Very progressive—until the richest forty percent formed a coalition and got the program killed. It's easy to imagine the same thing happening on capital gains, with the majority who have *some* prospect of a gain ganging up on the poorer minority. Live by the majority's bank balance, die by the majority's bank balance.

Appeals to economic self-interest ("we stand with *you*") are a particularly inauspicious basis for redistributive politics at a time when the affluent are growing more numerous. "We latch onto the us-versus-them rhetoric," observed Bruce Babbitt, the Democratic ex-governor of Arizona, in a recent *Harper's* debate. "The problem is, something's changed. There used to be more of 'us'; now there's more of 'them.' "

Suppose Democrats did assemble a majority by campaigning against rising income inequality. What are they going to do about it? This is a more profound difficulty facing Money Liberals. The growing rich-poor

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gap isn't an opportunity for them, it's a problem, because none of the suggested methods for restoring America's former level of inequality is very plausible.

The underlying causes of the inequality trend appear to be deep, long-term changes in the economy and society. Of the two most often-cited causes, one is demographic: the flood of baby boomers into the labor market. Because young workers are typically in their low-earning years, the advent of the boomers produces a natural bulge (a "pig in the python") at the lower end of the wage scale. Worse, as the boomers compete with each other for entry-level work, they bid down entry-level wages. The real median income of full-time younger workers actually fell from 1973 to 1987, while that of older workers rose. There may be other demographic trends at work—most ominously, a greater tendency of high-salaried men to marry high-salaried women, leaving one-earner families in the dust. But the baby boom is the most obvious explanation.

It's supposed to be a reassuring explanation, on the theory that income differences caused by the boom will cure themselves over time. As boomers age and earn more, the "pig" should slide into the middle of the income python. The only problem with this happy scenario, as Gary Burtless of the Brookings Institution notes, is that it isn't happening. Boomers started hitting their mid-thirties in 1980. Age-wise, the pig is already near the middle. If the maturing of the boom was going to reverse the trend toward inequality, that "should have begun happening at the beginning of the eighties," Burtless says. Instead, "you actually see acceleration [of the inequality trend] . . . all the gaps have gone up."

They've gone up, in part, because of a second obvious factor: the growing disparity in pay between skilled and unskilled labor. For decades after World War II, guidance counselors told high schoolers that without a college education they'd be sunk—and for decades the guidance counselors were wrong. In the sixties and seventies, economist Frank Levy points out, the economic advantage of a college degree actually diminished. In 1973 college grads made only fifteen percent more than mere high school grads. But in the eighties the pay of the college-educated took off. By 1986 the gap in earnings had widened to forty-nine percent.

Why did this happen? Reich, convincingly, points to global trade. In a free trade regime, he notes, unskilled labor will tend to be performed where it can be done most cheaply—which these days is in Asia or Mexico and which may soon be in Eastern Europe or Africa. (See "As the World Turns," TNR, May 1, 1989.) As "routine production" jobs move overseas, unskilled Americans must compete with each other for the unskilled jobs that remain, mainly in the service sector. Meanwhile American brainworkers—"symbolic analysts," Reich calls them—are still competitive. They include the usual suspects: "lawyers, investment bankers, commercial bankers, management consultants, research scientists, academics, public-relations executives . . . ," etc.

Surely an intuitive fear of this Reichian scenario underlay the press's fascination, in the early eighties, with stories of ex-autoworkers stocking drug stores for the minimum wage. It's also why the film *Roger & Me*, for all its factual slipperiness, strikes a nerve by contrasting unemployed GM workers with partying yuppies. The jobs lost at GM were precious—they were "good jobs"—not because they paid "good wages," but because they paid good wages *for unskilled work*.

Add the pay-for-skills explanation to the baby boom and you've got . . . well, you still don't have quite enough. Demographics and differences in formal "skills" can't account for all the growth in income inequality. Inequality isn't increasing just between young and old, or between those with only a high school diploma and those with a college degree. It's increasing *within* the ranks of forty-year-old men with four years of college.

Levy concludes: "There must be a third factor." What that third factor is remains something of a mystery. One candidate is this: as skills become more important and are rewarded financially, differences in performance between individuals with the same formal skills or training also become more important, and are rewarded financially. The more valuable the training, the greater the income inequality among those with the *same* training.

The ideal type here is Hollywood. Suppose we gave a hundred people extensive training as actors (a species of "symbolic analyst") and set them loose at Sunset and Vine to seek their fortunes. What would we see if we came back ten years later? An equal distribution curve? Hardly. We'd see some actors working in commercials, some waiting on tables, and some, the Eddie Murphys of the world, commanding astronomical salaries. All this would make some economic sense. Eddie Murphy is *worth* millions, because his films make much more money than films of equally well-schooled actors who nevertheless don't have what Murphy has.

So it is in the rest of the economy, on a less dramatic scale. When the middle class consisted of workers tightening bolts on the assembly line, the difference between a superlative bolt-tightener and a merely competent bolt-tightener wasn't much, economically. As long as the bolts didn't come loose, management had no compelling reason not to pay both workers the same. But train those workers as computer repairmen, and the picture changes. The differences between a good repairman and a mediocre repairman are probably substantial, and worth rewarding. Train workers as computer *programmers*, and the picture changes even more. The difference between good and bad programmers is enormous, and employers will be tempted to recognize it with a big difference in pay.

The increased relative value of top performers is only part of the Hollywood Effect. The other part is the breakdown of the mechanisms that once prevented the most talented members of a profession from extracting

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the full measure of their worth. The most obvious of these mechanisms are unions. But other, often informal, customs are more important in the upper ranges. When big law firms were a cozy bunch, aggressive young associates simply didn't leave after only two or three years—who would hire them? The studio system kept movie stars' salaries in check. The major league draft did the same for baseball players. In general, it was considered an act of disloyalty for executives to desert their employers for another firm. Today, if you *don't* switch employers every few years you run the risk of being branded a "tree-hugger." Professional "headhunters" dismember old-line firms. Baseball free-agents negotiate $3 million-a-year contracts. The studio system is dead, and Jack Nicholson makes $50 million for a single movie. Brokerage houses are no longer WASP clubs, and Michael Milken takes home half a billion.

Money Liberals would appear to have their work cut out for them. Reich's global division of labor, and the accompanying Hollywood Effect, certainly aren't about to be reversed by anything Speaker Foley has in the hopper. Not that there aren't ideas around. Democratic physicians who would lower society's unhealthy income-inequality level tend to prescribe a number of cures, often embracing them in quick succession like so many miracle diets. Let's take them one at a time, starting with the current favorite:

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Taxes and transfers: This is the "progressivity" solution. Are some people making too much money? Well, tax them and send the cash to those who are making less. For example, Democrats and liberal editorialists routinely endorse expanding the Earned-Income Tax Credit—a transfer payment to poor working families—not just as a good way to end poverty, which it is, but as a way (in *Washington Post* columnist Paul Blustein's words) to "help reverse the trend toward greater income inequality that has arisen in recent years."

Such transfers "help" reverse the trend toward greater income inequality just as by filling my bathtub I help lower the rise in the world's oceans. Every bit helps. Actually *reversing* the trend is something else. It's not simply a matter of undoing regressive tax cuts and twiddling a few other dials at Progression Control. The Reagan tax cuts hardly made things more equal, but the size of the underlying shift in income *before* taxes far outweighed the impact of the cuts. Of the $16,000 increase in the average after-tax income of the richest ten percent of families between 1980 and 1988, only about $1,200 came from tax changes, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Even moderate shifts in something as large as the American income structure are too big to be easily negated by making the tax code more progressive. The problem isn't the expense of boosting the earnings of the poor, or at least the earnings of the poor who work. That can, should, and probably will be done (mainly through the tax credit). The problem, the place where large sums would have to be moved, is higher on the income ladder, where large sums are being generated.

Suppose, for example, we wanted to tax the richest one percent enough so their share of income after federal taxes would be equal to what it was back in, say, 1977. In 1977 their after-tax share was 7.3 percent. By 1990 it was about 12.6 percent. Do a little arithmetic, and you realize that to lower the share back to 7.3 percent, these richest Americans have to lose about 42 percent of the income they now have left over after federal taxes. The effective federal tax rate on this group is currently about 27 percent, which means that 73 percent of their before-tax income is now left over. We'd have to take that 73 percent and tax away 42 percent of it, which works out to an extra tax of 30 percent on their entire pre-tax income.

Simply put, the total effective tax rate on the richest one percent would have to be more than doubled, to around 57 percent (the current 27 percent rate plus 30). Going back to the tax code we had in 1977, before all those nasty Reagan-era cuts, will hardly do the trick—that would only boost the effective rate on the rich from 27 to 35 percent.

The United States has never had an effective tax rate on the rich of close to 57 percent, except perhaps during World War II (and probably not even then, though data are sketchy). Sure, we've had high "mar-

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ginal" rates—the marginal rate being the tax paid on the last dollar someone earns in a given year. But *effective* rates—the percentage of all dollars of income that actually gets paid in taxes—are invariably lower. That's mainly because the rich find tax shelters that let them avoid paying the high marginal levies. In 1980, for example, the top tax rate was 50 percent on "earned" income and 70 percent on investment income. But the effective income tax paid by the richest one percent was 23.9 percent.

Among our industrial competitors, only Sweden has an effective income tax rate in the range that would be required for the Tax and Transfer Cure. But the Swedes are the world's champions at taxation. Asking Americans to tax like the Swedes is like asking us to play cricket like the English or yodel like the Swiss. It would require a "tax revolution," as the Brookings Institution's Henry Aaron puts it.

In fact, there is a tax revolt. Unfortunately for Money Liberals, it's in Sweden. Marginal income taxes for the rich are being cut from eighty-two percent to about fifty percent. There are limits, Sweden's governing Social Democrats have discovered, to how much you can counteract the market's inequality through the tax system. Set taxes high enough, and high-earners will exploit loopholes that can't be easily closed. They will, for example, invest in assets that appreciate untaxed (e.g., art) rather than income-producing assets. The only way to plug this loophole completely would be to appraise everyone's assets each year and then tax any increase as if it were income, a task no developed nation attempts.

To truly counteract the inequality trend, of course, you'd have to tax away the income gains not of the top one percent, but of everyone who has recently been gaining—something like the top fifteen to thirty percent of the income scale. And there would be no guarantee that these taxes wouldn't have to be raised again in the future. Money Liberals who pursue the Tax and Transfer Cure must be ready to ratchet taxes ever upward should the market start generating new inequality.

You don't have to be ideologically opposed to tax increases to realize this isn't going to happen. Democrats may win what they will regard as tremendous victories—a rise in the top income tax rate to thirty-three or even thirty-eight percent. The press will hail their success in fighting "rising income inequality." In fact they won't have come close to actually negating the rise in income inequality. Instead of trying to tax away what the affluent are making in the marketplace, maybe Money Liberals should try to prevent people from earning such unequal incomes in the first place.

Training: If money now tends to follow skills, why not make the distribution of income more equal (without taxes and transfers) by making the distribution of skills more equal? Better schools, more college loans, ambitious corporate and government training programs for those who don't go to college—everybody likes this cure for income inequality. Reich, Lester Thurow, and countless Democratic study groups endorse it.

It's hard to argue against training. Highly skilled workers make America more prosperous in a world where a nation's "comparative advantage" comes not so much from natural resources as from the resources people carry around inside their heads. Democrats, rightly, say that much investment in training must be made by the government. Private companies don't have enough incentive to train workers, who might then take their new skills and go work for somebody else.

When it comes to curing income inequality, training advocates evoke an especially appealing picture: today's unemployed steelworkers and $5-an-hour oil-changers, newly schooled as programmers and accountants, stepping up into the middle class. As Reich says, there's no economic reason why, in a global economy, Americans can't all be "symbolic analysts."

One thing this picture leaves out is the Hollywood Effect. Look again at Reich's list of "analysts." All of these professions require some (often a lot of) training as a condition of entry. But they are also professions in which there is a big difference—in value and salary—between competent workers and stars. Only a hopeless credentialist would think that this difference is related in linear fashion to "skills" that can be consistently imparted through courses or college degrees. How do you train someone to be Tom Wolfe?

The Training Cure, then, might not reduce income inequality much at all. The more government policy pushes Americans into Reich's "symbolic-analytical" pursuits, the more it pushes them into lines of work subject to the Hollywood Effect. If everyone were a lawyer or architect, mediocre lawyers and architects might become the new proletarians, bidding down salaries dramatically, while superstar lawyers and architects got even richer than their current equivalents. The bigger America's "analytical" industries get, the bigger will be the incomes of those who rise to the top of them.

There's also the more delicate issue of whether everybody can be trained to perform even competently at skilled jobs—and the still more delicate issue of whether what makes a person trainable is inherited or not. Some people just aren't talented enough to be computer programmers no matter how many classes they attend. You don't have to believe those talents are inherited (or that they can be summed up by "IQ") to suspect that relatively fewer people are likely to have whatever it takes to be a good "symbolic analyst" than to have what it takes to be a good autoworker. The end result of the Training Cure, then, might not simply be income inequality, but a particularly nasty form of income inequality rigorously based on talent and smarts.

Unions: One who has been skeptical of the Training Cure is Robert Kuttner. All the talk of skills, he's argued, turns the problem on its head: "Since the real problem is the supply of good jobs rather than the supply of good workers, emphasis on education and training will make the work force even more frustrated than it is now." Again, "good jobs" doesn't mean skilled jobs. "There is nothing intrinsic in assembling

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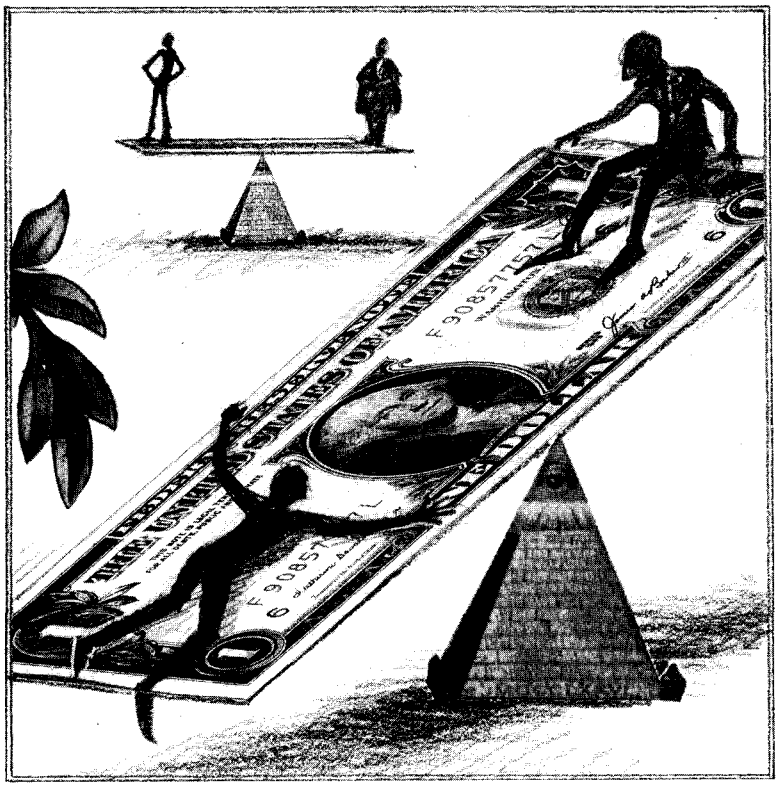
cars, mining coal, or pouring molten steel that requires high wages," Kuttner points out. "These jobs *do* pay well mainly because of the efforts of strong unions." The solution to income inequality seems to follow: "The simplest way to promote relatively equal wage scales is to encourage trade unionism."

Kuttner doesn't really want a resurgence of American unionism. He wants Swedish unionism. In Sweden, some ninety-five percent of blue-collar workers belong to a single national union, and seventy-five percent of Swedish white-collar workers belong to three other unions. In the United States, unions cover barely sixteen percent of the work force, and they are organized industry-by-industry. Eighteen-dollar-an-hour UAW workers aren't about to strike so that $5-an-hour garment workers can earn more. But the big Swedish blue-collar union, because it represents practically everyone, has been able to pursue a "solidaristic" wage policy that tries to narrow wage gaps nationwide, paying more to those whom the market would slight and holding down the wages of workers who might be able to demand more.



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Did it work? At the very bottom of the income scale, the "solidarity" policy seems to have enforced a minimum wage (Sweden has no minimum wage law). Above that level, though, its impact appears to have been largely chimerical. Most of the equality the union enforced in national bargaining was undone in the period between contracts, as employers rewarded skilled workers with increases at the local level. Eventually this inegalitarian "wage drift" accounted for between forty and fifty percent of the earnings increases of Swedish blue-collar workers. In the late seventies the union began to back away from "solidarity."

More significant, the "solidarity wage" can't be expected to control the increases at the affluent end of the distribution that are the distinctive feature of today's growing inequality. In 1979 the top quintile of Swedes made roughly 2.5 times the national average, before taxes and transfers. In 1980 the top quintile of Americans made 2.6 times the average. Not a big difference. Unions haven't stopped Sweden's income distribution from growing more unequal over the past decade—due to increases at the top.

In this country, are militant investment bankers going to organize to impose an egalitarian salary scale on Wall Street? Are lawyers going to strike to hold down Melvin Belli's income? Don't hold your breath. In Hollywood, where actors, directors, and screenwriters *are* organized, unions have done nothing to reduce salaries at the top.

Protectionism: One way to halt the Reich scenario would be to halt our international trade. Semi-protectionist half-measures wouldn't do—they'd only slow the scenario down. But stopping imports of autos and steel would preserve the "good" middle-class jobs of American auto- and steelworkers. If other countries retaliated against our products, it would hurt mainly the Americans who have skills the world needs—i.e., Reich's symbolic analysts. Even better for income equality!

Few people advocate such strict protectionism, of course, because it would make us far poorer as a nation. An autarkic America might have a bigger "middle," but it would be a middle that couldn't buy what middle classes in free-trading countries could buy. That would make sense only if *all* we care about is income equality.

"Flexible" production: Sophisticated Money Liberals reject protectionism, but they know the global economy is producing greater income inequality for Americans. Like Marxists confronting the triumph of capitalism, they must entertain the suspicion that the freight train of history isn't going their way. For Reich, the dilemma must be especially acute. What could possibly overcome his own coldly convincing analysis of the problem?

Reich's answer is a happy ending of the sort Marxists would find familiar, involving as it does a propitious shift in the "mode of production." Not the end of capitalism, in this case, but a shift within capitalism to a new form of production that (it just so happens) will generate more equal incomes. "High volume, standardized production," Reich has written, "will to a great extent be replaced by flexible-system production, in which integrated teams of workers identify and solve problems. *This new organization of work necessarily will be more collaborative, participatory, and egalitarian.*" (Emphasis added.)

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Reich's new form of production seems to combine two trends. The first is what Michael Piore and Charles Sabel call "flexible specialization"—enterprises that turn out a variety of products in small batches to serve rapidly changing markets. Because the boss must be able to talk with the designer and the artisans who will produce the products, unnecessary (and inequality-producing) layers of hierarchy must be eliminated.

The second trend is the effect of computers on productive enterprises, whether they produce small batches or large. What's new about computers, says Harvard Business School professor Shoshana Zuboff, is that they make unprecedented amounts of information instantly available to everyone in a company. To take advantage of this potential, firms must let the low-level operators who have their hands on the computer alter and improve a production process that is "flexible" in that it's constantly evolving. The newly empowered operators are paid more, and paid for their capabilities rather than their rank.

Neither type of flexible production pretends to preserve unskilled jobs. On the contrary, the flexible firm is the kingdom of the skilled. Who else is going to reprogram machine tools to produce some designer's fantasy, or tinker with the software at a pulp mill? "Flexibility" thus presupposes training. Zuboff describes an automated mill where the workers—mostly not college graduates—had to be taught "the basics of math, physics, and chemistry in addition to specific material on the pulping process." What "flexible production" adds to the Training Cure is the claim that all this training will be for jobs in companies with hierarchies considerably flatter than we're now used to.

But would those flatter hierarchies really produce more income equality within each firm? Not necessarily. According to Zuboff, remember, people won't be paid according to their positions in the hierarchy. They'll be paid according to their skill and knowledge. That means flexible firms are likely to be playgrounds for the Hollywood Effect. As Reich says, "Workers' skill, judgment, and initiative become the determinants of the flexible-system enterprise's competitive success." Judgment and initiative are the sorts of things it's difficult to "train" into everyone. Isn't it likely that workers with these qualities will be paid more—much more?

Even equality within each firm hardly means equality in society as a whole. If you need skills to work in a flexible firm, and flexible firms dominate the economy, then the unskilled are in for an especially rough time. Money Liberals can't count on flexible production to close the growing pay gap based on skill. It's part of what will *cause* that gap.

Profit-sharing: OK, forget "flexibility." Why not spread profits more equally among the workers of all enterprises, flexible or not, through profit-sharing or actual worker-ownership? That wouldn't require any fancy changes in the technology or product mix of a firm. The Ford Motor Company has profit sharing, but Ford still mass-produces cars on assembly lines.

Profit-sharing in effect changes the ownership of enterprises. If it does nothing else, it should spread around the rewards of capitalism. Instead of razor-tycoon Victor Kiam getting $1 million, say, a thousand of his workers might get $1,000. Of course, the risks would also be spread around. In modern America, though, the potential rewards tend to outweigh the risks, in part because losses are limited by the bankruptcy laws.

But the main point about profit-sharing is that it is usually combined with "participatory" schemes to unlock the energy and knowledge of shop-floor workers. Both rewards and power are redistributed—and, what's more, they are redistributed to the unskilled as well as the skilled. Japan is the model here, as in so much else. Japanese firms pay their workers about a third of their compensation as a year-end bonus—a de facto system of profit sharing. Big Japanese firms also involve shop-floor workers in all sorts of "quality circles" and decision-making teams. Pay differentials between managers and workers are low, and at each level pay is linked to seniority rather than individual performance (in the interest of group "cohesiveness"). As a result, overall pay differences within Japanese firms are from one-half to one-third those in American firms.

The problem, as usual when emulating Japan, is figuring out how to get from here to there, how to act Japanese without somehow magically adopting all of Japanese culture. It's not easy to explain the Japanese system in strict economists' terms. If Toyota has "compressed wage differentials," for example, why doesn't some other firm spring up and hire away Toyota's "star" employees by paying them more? David Levine and Laura D'Andrea Tyson ask this question in a recent Brookings paper, but they don't come up with much more of an explanation than "a cultural element that discourages job changing" in Japan. Over there, it's just not done. Over here, of course, it's done all the time, now more than ever.

The prospect of turning American business culture around, when it's going full speed in the opposite direction, might reasonably strike voters as remote. Just as likely is the possibility that Japan will become more like us. Perhaps Japanese firms have been able to hold on to their "stars" only because since World War II they've been continuously growing, which made room for promotions. Let the Japanese economy "mature" and stagnate, and the headhunting will begin.

In the long run, profit-sharing—especially in the extreme form of worker-ownership—could simply flop. Worker-shareholders might be reluctant to take efficiency-enhancing steps (such as moving to another state in search of cheap raw materials) that ruthless entrepreneurs would take. We don't know. Profit-sharing seems to be the Money Liberals' best bet. But even if it survives in the market and succeeds in compressing pay scales a bit, there's no guarantee it will come close to canceling out the broad inegalitarian trend of higher-pay-for-skills. If we're at a stage of

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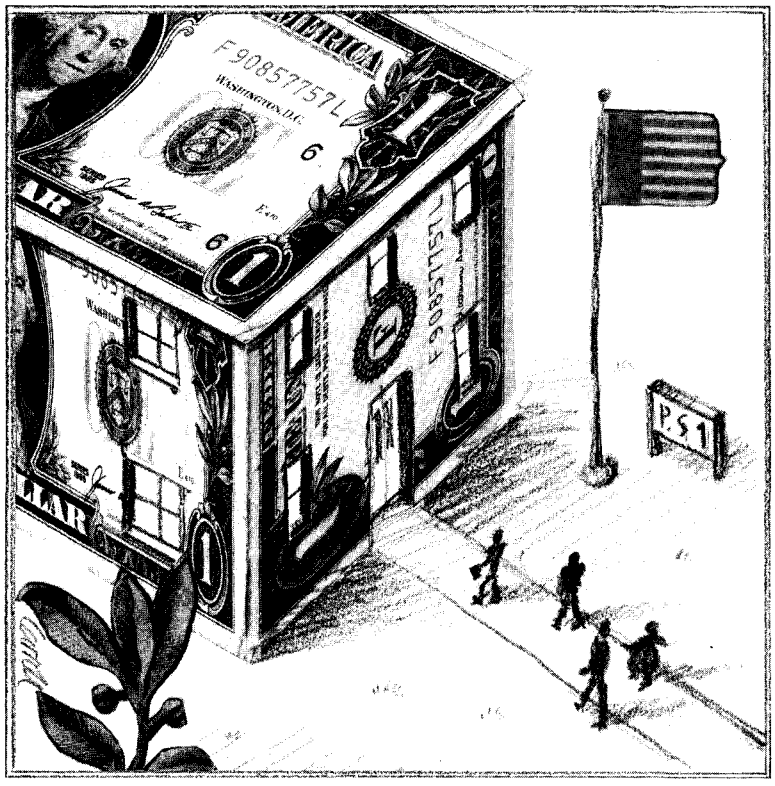
economic evolution in which "symbolic analysts" are highly valued, they'll be able to demand more from profit-sharing firms just as they do from conventional firms. Another country where income inequality is rising is Japan.

In setting themselves against the rise in income inequality, Money Liberals would seem to be choosing a war they can't win. They may "help offset" the growth of income inequality. But what kind of victory is that? Surely if income inequality is an evil, then what we should want is less of it, not more of it at a slightly slower pace. Even less inequality might not be very satisfying. Suppose that somehow, through heroic exertions, Democrats managed actually to reverse the inequality trend and re-create the income inequality levels of 1977. Was that such a good year? Weren't liberals upset about income inequality in 1977 too?

Here we arrive at a familiar problem with Money Liberalism: its disconcerting open-endedness. Democratic rhetoric is filled with the impulse to redistribute income from rich to poor. But there is no impulse that tells us when the redistribution *ought to stop*. At what point would liberals declare victory? Democrats have developed a whole repertoire of fudge-phrases to avoid this question: they believe "the strong owe a duty to the weak" (Edward Kennedy); they favor—in FDR's early evasion—the "underprivileged" over the "overprivileged." This magazine's Michael Kinsley recently declared in his TRB column that "the tax code should mitigate inequalities in income to some extent." Perhaps some Democrats would find that a rousing slogan. But to *what* extent?



DRAWING BY ALLEN CARROLL FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Why do we care about income inequality, anyway? In the answer to this question, I think, lies the Democrats' route of escape. The answer I'd like to invoke is that of the great British historian and socialist R. H. Tawney:

> What is repulsive is not that one man should earn more than others, for where community of environment, and a common education and habit of life, have bred a common tradition of respect and consideration, these details of the counting-house are forgotten or ignored. It is that some classes should be excluded from the heritage of civilization which others enjoy, and that the fact of human fellowship, which is ultimate and profound, should be obscured by economic contrasts, which are trivial and superficial.

The name for Tawney's goal is social equality. We want a society where each citizen can hold his head up, where nobody has to fawn or toady to anybody else.

Social equality is not income equality; it can coexist (as Tawney acknowledges) with material disparities. Yet recognizing social equality as the liberals' goal might actually give Money Liberalism some of the coherence it usually lacks. All types of liberals, it might be said, want to prevent income differences from producing degrading social differences. Money Liberals try to do this by reducing the income differences (or, more accurately, suppressing the income differences constantly thrown up by the market). The redistribution would stop, presumably, when money disparities weren't so big that they threatened to undermine the equal dignity of citizens.

But if it's social equality liberals are really after, there is another course of action available. That is to pursue social equality directly, rather than by somehow manipulating the distribution of wealth. Instead of trying to suppress inequality of money, this strategy would try to *restrict the sphere in which money matters*, to prevent the income inequality inevitably generated by capitalism from translating into invidious social distinctions.

Call this strategy Civic Liberalism. Its basic idea was first elaborated (as far as I know) by the contemporary philosopher Michael Walzer. It attempts not to rearrange wealth "progressively," but to circumscribe wealth's power. The primary way it does this is through social institutions that create a sphere of life—a public, community sphere—where money doesn't "talk," where the principles of the marketplace (i.e., rich beats poor) are replaced by the principle of equal citizenship. As the Eastern European champions of "civil society" tried to carve out a social space free of Communist domination, so Civic Liberals would carve out a space free of capitalist domination, of domination by wealth.

The foundation of this public sphere, of course, is democracy itself. There the rule is not "one dollar, one vote," it's "one citizen, one vote." But the same equality principle applies in other potentially significant com-

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ponents of community life, such as public schools, the military draft, public hospitals, highways, parks, and museums. These institutions are especially valuable because, unlike the rather abstract equality of voting, they induce rich and poor actually to rub shoulders as equals. So do some public-sphere institutions that aren't run by the government. We're in the public sphere when we use the city library—but also when we go to a ball game. Anything that mixes income classes under conditions of equality serves Civic Liberalism.

Money Liberals often claim that broad income transfer programs, such as Social Security, also reinforce a sense of "solidarity," because they benefit the upper and middle classes as well as the poor. But how much solidarity is there in cashing a check? Rich and poor don't even cash them in the same places. (Certainly receipt of Social Security didn't do much to breed empathy with the poor among the affluent retirees who demanded repeal of "catastrophic care.") Civic Liberals want more than the community of check-cashers. They want a part of *life* in which prosperous people and non-prosperous people help each other, flirt, complain, talk about the weather, save each other's place in line and (in the case of the military) each others' lives.

Now, you can argue that the public sphere, like income equality, has declined over the past few decades—and you'd be right. Money "talks" at the ballot box today, more loudly than it once did. More important, the prosperous and the poor no longer rub shoulders in the schools of even small cities, as the middle class jumps to exclusive suburbs or else abandons public education entirely. In bigger cities the everyday experience of public life in streets, parks, subways, and libraries has been ruined by crime, incivility, and neglect. The peacetime draft has been replaced by a mercenary military that the affluent simply avoid. "The only institution that reliably mixes different folks together is the department of motor vehicles," says Barbara Ehrenreich. And they now send out licenses by mail.

This deterioration of public institutions is what Civic Liberalism would concern itself with reversing. That is easier said than done—but it's easier done than the Canute-like job of Money Liberalism. We can't stop the basic tides of our economy. But we can build dikes.

Parts of the public sphere could be rejuvenated with surprising speed. We can minimize the role of money in politics through public financing and the provision of free television time. We can have a national health insurance system that brings at least ninety percent of the population into the same waiting rooms. Canada has one. Britain has one. Germany has one. True, these systems differ. But any of them would do the job for social equality.

We don't need a big military draft today, though it would probably do more for social equality than all the check-mailing schemes Money Liberals can devise. (In World War II Kennedys served side by side with crackers—is it because of the income distribution that Americans remember those years as an egalitarian time?) What we do need are young people to help teach reading, to plant trees, to change sheets in understaffed hospitals. Mandatory civilian service would have a draft-like effect in forcing all classes of Americans, at a crucial age, to work with and for each other. Those who prefer military service could choose it instead.

New public-sphere possibilities crop up in all sorts of places. Right now, for example, Congress is debating whether to encourage communal day-care centers or simply to give cash to parents with preschool kids, whether they use day care or not. Civic Liberals would tend to favor communal centers, located near the workplace. Let lawyers and shop clerks fret about their toddlers together.

Reviving some older components of the public sphere will be more difficult. I'm thinking here of the schools and the public amenities (streets, parks, mass transit) of urban areas. The difficulty common to both is the underclass. It takes only a small number of muggers, hasslers, and drug dealers to destroy a public space, in a vicious circle familiar to residents of New York City. First, the egalitarian experience—riding the subways, say—becomes unpleasant. Citizens with a bit of money retreat to private alternatives (i.e., taxis) that protect them from the public. ("Insulate!, Insulate!" advises a bond trader in Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*.) They are then reluctant to pay the taxes necessary to maintain the public institution they no longer use. It deteriorates further, more people abandon it, etc.

In the schools, fear of the underclass magnifies an exclusionary impulse that is always present. As an upper-middle-class American, I'd have few qualms about having my child see the same doctor as a welfare mother's child, or even go to the same day-care center. It's another thing to send my child to a school populated with welfare children. The point of schools is to transmit culture, and nobody (in the black middle class, especially) wants his kids immersed in the culture of poverty. The response to this fear has been geographic segregation by class, so that even "public" neighborhood schools now reinforce social *in*equality.

The idea of "public choice" in education offers some hope. It means students don't have to attend their neighborhood school; they can pick any school in the city. In New York more than a thousand families, many white and middle class, actually send their kids into East Harlem to attend experimental "choice" schools alongside ghetto kids, with good educational results. But "public choice" has difficulty breaking down the city-suburb barrier. Why would suburban parents abandon their fortresses and support any scheme in which their children might wind up in class with the very kids they fled the city to avoid?

The full flowering of the public sphere will have to await a solution to the underclass problem. But that's a problem liberals must confront anyway. The existence of a whole group of resented, resentful people cut off from mainstream society is in itself a profound violation

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of social equality. There's a reason (capitalism) why America must have income inequality. There is no reason America must have a large underclass. Our government has sustained this class through the welfare checks that support single-parent, non-working families. What the government sustains, it can stop sustaining. The necessary step is clear: end the mailing of cash welfare checks to any poor, husbandless woman who gets pregnant and substitute a guaranteed low-wage job, plus day care, plus whatever subsidies are available to other low-wage workers. The much-hyped 1988 welfare reform came nowhere near accomplishing this (it basically requires about ten percent of welfare mothers to train part-time). Even the establishment-liberal Ford Foundation now urges a far tougher approach. The idea is to replace the isolating welfare mentality with the mainstream work ethic.

Not coincidentally, the work ethic is the only plausible basis for the universal egalitarian culture that is the ultimate goal of Civic Liberals. Not everybody can be prosperous. But everybody who is able can work, and those who do (and who otherwise respect civility) should know they've satisfied the requirement for admission to the public sphere on a dignified, equal basis. The Civic Liberal bet is that Americans aren't really eager to impoverish their lives by limiting their associations to people of their own economic class or skin color. They are only unwilling to share their society with people who reject its few basic values.

End that threat, and the vicious circle will begin to reverse. Taxpayers will be more willing to invest in parks, in mass transit, in clean streets and playgrounds, because more taxpayers will be using them. Eventually Civic Liberals might not have to worry about how to mix schoolchildren from city and suburb—because we will discover we can end the economic segregation of the suburbs themselves, building housing for the working poor near the homes of the affluent. The mingling of the classes will never be perfect, or even close. It doesn't have to be. For Civic Liberalism to work, it only need be sufficient to sustain a "common tradition of respect."

Civic Liberals would still have to worry about money. They need to ensure that all disabled and working Americans have the minimum income necessary to lead a dignified life. If that minimum is set at the poverty line, we're only about $15 billion a year in tax credits and disability increases away from this goal. Beyond that, Democrats would be liberated from Money Liberalism's larger obsession with somehow rendering the entire income distribution "more equal" (an obsession that in the end only makes money seem more important).

Tax progressivity could also be one part of a Civic Liberal strategy. Under the "sacrifice" theory, progressive taxes, like the draft, are a concrete expression of equality in sharing the burdens of the public sphere. And the agenda just outlined—national health insurance, national service, day-care centers, jobs for welfare mothers—would unquestionably require a large tax increase (one reason today's Republicans will never be Civic Liberals). The money might as well be raised progressively.

But, compared with the public sphere institutions they can finance, progressive taxes are pretty weak social-egalitarian medicine. Writing a tax check doesn't produce much more in the way of egalitarian fellowship than cashing a Social Security check. With Civic Liberalism, the minute shifts in progressivity detailed in the back pages of Congressional Budget Office reports would become less of a big deal. Democrats wouldn't need to judge every policy and subpolicy—every cigarette tax, payroll tax, gas tax, gains tax, Social Security cut, VAT, or tariff—by whether it was "regressive." Don't we want to discourage the poor as well as the rich from killing themselves with cigarettes? With their progressivity fetish, Democrats have become like a car that can only make left turns. They have elevated the details of the counting-house into the sine qua non of equality.

In December 1936 George Orwell traveled to Barcelona to fight in the Spanish Civil War and discovered the city in the control of the Anarchists. They had carried out a social revolution, which Orwell described in a famous passage:

> Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. . . . Tipping had been forbidden by law since the time of Primo de Rivera; almost my first experience was receiving a lecture from an hotel manager for trying to tip a lift-boy.

Orwell declared he "had breathed the air of equality." I think something like that is what equality still means. It's not a material concept. Did it really matter whether Orwell made more money than his waiter?

What matters isn't money inequality so much as what we make of it. As long as people use money to measure status they will be able to latch onto whatever material gradations survive redistributionist assault. We could all drive government-issue Honda Accords, but if only some could afford the LX edition we might soon be craning our necks to spot those two letters on every car that passed. By the same token, if people valued money as a means of making life more enjoyable, but considered it no more related to essential human worth than the ability to curl your tongue—if money, in short, was only money—then the equal dignity of those at the bottom could survive even in the face of huge differences of income.

Surely we can have the sort of society we want whether the top quintile controls 43.9 percent of the nation's income or 49.9 percent. It looks as if it will have to be the latter. That's fine, if we build a public sphere sturdy enough to cabin this new wealth's power—a sphere with (to quote Tocqueville) enough of the "pleasures of equality" so that "in order to taste them, nothing is required but to live." This is the great unfinished liberal business of the 1990s: not to equalize money, but to put money in its place. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

In the Beginning

Peter Brook's film of **The Mahabharata** (MK2 Productions) compounds some of the problems of his theater production of the work, but it also has some pleasant surprises. The original poem, wrote Gautam Dasgupta in *Performing Arts Journal* three years ago, "is a compilation, in over 90,000 stanzas, of vast Brahamanic lore," composed "somewhere between 400 B.C. and 200 A.D." Episodes from this epic, the longest in the world, are frequently performed in India, said Dasgupta, in various Indian theater modes, but always

> with a deeply ingrained structure of ritual beliefs and ethical codes intrinsic to its audience. *The Mahabharata* is . . . an empty shell if it is read merely as a compendium of martial legends, of revenge, valor and bravura. And that, precisely, is the reading attributed to *The Mahabharata* by [its adapters, Jean-Claude] Carrière and Brook.

When this theater production played in Brooklyn in 1987, even those innocent of the original, like myself, could tell that it was an "empty shell," though it ran nine hours. (It was available two ways, in three visits or in one fell swoop. I opted for the swoop.)

With the film, comment on literary mayhem is pointless. This version runs a bit less than three hours. (Marie-Hélène Estienne helped Carrière and Brook with the screenplay.) The stage play, by its gargantuan length, implied that it was more or less presenting the whole of the poem. The film, by its relative brevity, makes no such pretense. It obviates such criticism as the above by virtually declaring that it is only a précis.

Paralleling the three states of *The Mahabharata* itself—original, theater, and film—are the three physical environments of Brook's version. It was first performed in 1985 in a stone quarry in southern France, and a friend of mine who saw it was much struck with its sweep and spectacle, including the many lamps and torches—Brook is very partial to fire—on the rocky surfaces under the night sky. In a Brooklyn theater I wasn't greatly impressed with the production as spectacle (nor was my friend). Now the morphology has changed yet again; now it is not only much shorter, it is in a different context of affect.

For this Western viewer, with minuscule knowledge of Indian culture, the film is more successful. This is not just because it's less of an endurance test, though we always carry a secret scale in our minds to weigh whether a long work is justifying its size, but because this shorter version, in a more accessible medium, makes it much easier—mad though this sounds—to get pleasure from the performance though we still don't always understand what is happening.

And again this is strange because, owing to previous experience with Brook's films, I was apprehensive. Though his film of the Marat-Sade play (from his stage production) was gripping, his *Lord of the Flies* was inept, his mystical *Meetings with Remarkable Men* was a sententious joke, and his Proust screenplay *Swann in Love* (directed by Schlöndorff) was despicable.

The opening of *The Mahabharata* isn't reassuring. While some glistening spheres radiate in space, a voice tells us of the three gods who rule the universe. Then we see a brown-skinned youth in costume entering the door of a film studio. (A fire extinguisher (!) is prominent at the side.) He moves on to the set—the first of the many sets well designed by Chloe Obolensky, who also did the theater designs—and meets an old man. That "presentational" touch at the start, the shot of the studio door, is never justified, though from time to time actors address the camera.

The youth meets an old bard, who has composed a long poem in his head and wants the youth to set it down. (The actual writing is done by another man in an elephant mask.) All of what we subsequently see is the enactment of that poem—the bard himself steps into it occasionally to confer with his characters—which takes place as history begins. I make no attempt to distill the narrative(s) here. I note only that there are at least twenty-five principal characters, almost all of whom are kings or queens, that a dice game is crucial, and that a climactic sequence is an eighteen-day battle between two groups of kings. At the end, history is ready to go forward.

It is difficult to follow the story. Complications multiply, contradictions abound, questions are unanswered. Yet the film soon fascinates: individual scenes and confrontations and long speeches, as such, carry us through. Primarily this is because of an ultrasimple fact: every word can be clearly understood. This was certainly not true in the theater. The cast—exactly the same company, as far as I can tell—is a mixed lot of several races from many countries, Indian, British, Senegalese, Japanese, Turkish, Trinidadian, French, German, Italian, even Pol-

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Cinema Paradiso. *Full of flavor and enjoyable sentiment. A Sicilian boy grows up in a town where the movie theater is the hub of that small world. (Reviewed 2/19/90)* **Glory.** *American historical film at its near best. Deeply moving account of a black regiment and its white colonel in the Civil War. (1/8&15/90)* **Mama, There's a Man in Your Bed.** *The bed belongs to a large black cleaning woman who works in a Paris office. The man is the CEO of the company. Charm and fun. (3/5/90)* **Pretty Woman.** *Julia Roberts shines as a new star in this confection about an LA hooker and a big-time financier, Richard Gere. Pleasantness all the way. (4/16/90)* **—SK**

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ish. (Ryszard Cieslak, blessed in memory as a heroic actor in Grotowski's theater, here plays a blind king.) Much of what was said on stage in their mélange of accents in English was hard to follow. Here the microphone, invisible, is always close to the speaker, mouths can be seen, every word can be understood, and the varied accents are transmuted from handicap to benefit: they underscore the universality of the piece's meanings.

This leads to the film's greatest asset. Unlike almost all films, even the best, we see performances here that have been in the making for well over five years. Brook has molded his company into an ensemble, treasuring individuality yet instilling in all an aesthetic of natural, easy nobility. He has infused them with a sense of the stature of what they are doing; every one of them performs with largeness of spirit and classic candor of emotion. This was true on the stage but with much less effect because of the play's length and the verbal obscurity. Paradoxically, in a medium where one might expect such a style to be less congenial, quite contracinematic, the very spaciousness of the acting lifts, sustains, and vitalizes the film—to make block after block of it rewarding, whether or not the whole narrative is crystalline by Western standards.

I won't name any of the actors (beyond Cieslak) because I can't name all, and all are excellent. It's common to see a film in which the acting, or some of it, is better than the screenplay. But I can't remember another film in which the acting itself certified the *worth* of a text—even though it's in miniature here—that might otherwise have been remote. Some Indian commentators complained of the theater version that the largely non-Indian cast was culturally intrusive. Hypothetically, an Indian cast might possibly have been better. However, to a non-Indian viewer of the film, Brook's cast builds a bridge of art.

Two other matters help greatly. First is Brook's use of the camera. The entire film was made in one studio, and with a gently moving camera, with discreet closing-in on individual actors, with unobtrusive emphasis, he eliminates any hint of stasis. (And pyrophile that he is, he sometimes uses sheets of fire as "wipes" between scenes.)

Second is the fine work by William Lubtchansky, the cinematographer. Lubtchansky, who has worked with Bresson, Godard, and Truffaut, among others, and who helped to shoot *Shoah*, has given the lighting of the film both more variety and more consonance than the stage version had. Startling effects are of course much easier in film, but what Lubtchansky provides is something more subtle and affecting: variations on the generally golden light in which the world of mankind is beginning. •

You deserve a factual look at . . .

Mid-East Refugees

Who are they, what is the story?

You have read about hundreds of thousands of "Palestinian refugees" crowding camps in the Middle East, more than 40 years after leaving what is now Israel. Have you ever wondered why they are still homeless wanderers and why they have never been settled? Are you aware that they are not the only "refugees" in the Middle East?

What are the facts?

■ In 1948, on the day of the proclamation of the State of Israel, five Arab armies invaded the new country from all sides. In frightful radio broadcasts, they urged the Arabs living there to leave, so that the invading armies could operate without interference. They could return after the expected quick victory in that "holy war", get their property back—*and* that of the Jews. Things turned out differently. The invading armies were defeated. Those who had left became refugees—people without a country. Those who stayed, and their children, are full-fledged citizens of the State of Israel.

■ These so-called "Palestinian refugees" have not been allowed to settle in the "indivisible Arab nation". They have been supported in camps since 1948. So far, close to $1.8 billion has been spent on their maintenance. No end is in sight. Who pays for that? You guessed it: through UNWRA Relief, the United States contributes more than 60% of the total cost.

■ But there is another side to the "refugee" story. Little is heard of the 800,000 Jewish refugees from Arab countries, who fled those countries to settle in the newly formed Jewish state of Israel. Every one of these refugees was immediately accepted, resettled, taken care of, and given full citizenship by the fledgling, impoverished, and embattled Jewish State. There never has been, and there certainly is not now, a Jewish "refugee camp" in Israel or anywhere else.

■ The Arab refugees who fled Israel left little wealth and little history, since most of them had not come to "Palestine" until Jewish settlers opened economic opportunities in what had been a desolate country for centuries. But the Jews of Arab lands have a history going back thousands of years. When forced to flee, they left behind land, wealth, and a long history. They arrived in Israel, quite literally, only "with their shirts on their backs". They now make up 55% of the vibrant and productive population of Israel. What have the Arabs, the richest people in the world, done with "their" refugees in more than 40 years? They have kept them in misery, on the dole of the world, have taught their hopeless youth the "skills" of suicide missions and of slaughtering defenseless and unarmed men, women, and children.

■ Population transfers have been widely practiced throughout history. In 1923, Greece and Turkey agreed to the resettlement of 2 million Greeks and 800,000 Turks; in 1945, the resettlement of 3 million Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia was arranged. Following the collapse of its North African empire, France accepted close to 1.5 million people. More than 12 million(!) Muslims and Hindus were exchanged between India and Pakistan. Israel has recognized this historical necessity. The "Arab Nation", with its enormous wealth and vast, underpopulated lands, has stubbornly refused to face facts.

It is clear that the "Palestinian refugee problem" is a red herring, a phony issue, kept alive by the Arab nations for their political purposes, and with cynical disregard for the almost 600,000 impoverished people who still lead a sub-human existence in these camps. If the "Palestinian refugee problem" were to be solved—and it could disappear virtually overnight—the legitimacy of the State of Israel could no longer be questioned. But that is not acceptable to the Arabs. They are firmly committed not to allow any "non-believers" to be in control of any part of the Middle East. It is that, and that alone, which is the real cause of the "Palestinian refugee problem".

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Robert Brustein on Theater

What Makes a Play Live

Robert Woodruff's production of **Baal** at the Trinity Rep in Providence, like Richard Foreman's recent *Woyzeck* at the Hartford Stage, has subscription audiences reeling. The plays share many points of correspondence—one can trace a direct line from Büchner to Brecht in their nihilistic themes and episodic structures. The productions also resemble each other in the way Woodruff and Foreman manage to find postmodern equivalents for these ravaged German texts. *Baal* was Brecht's first play, written when he was only twenty-one; *Woyzeck* was unfinished when Büchner died at twenty-four. Youthful disenchantment scorches their pages like fitful lighting in an electrical storm. Sex, delirium, and death are inextricably linked. Only Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* explores the fatal consequences of eroticism with such morbid fascination.

The sex in *Baal* is sadomasochistic, polymorphous perverse. The hero's insatiable appetites are non-discriminatory. Booze, food, poetry, virgins, whores, women in pairs, men, boys, his own body—all are consumed with the same animal hunger. Woodruff has chosen to heighten the transvestite aspect of the play, recognizing that homosexuality, though tolerated in Weimar Germany (later Hitler included Brecht in his Museum of Decadent Art), is still the bane of Fundamentalist America.

Jesse Helms's fulminations over Mapplethorpe and Serrano are required reading in the lobby; his recorded voice is heard on stage, rasping about obscenity and perversion. The production breaks all the senator's moral commandments and will doubtless inflame him further; it is certainly testing the limits of audience tolerance. Lipsticked male actors in wigs, silk stockings, and garter belts cavort on stage, and Baal's erotic relationship with his young friend Ekart is frontally exploited. The anger and discomfort in the house are palpable. Spectators leave the theater telling Anne Bogart, Trinity Rep's new artistic director, that they will never return.

No question that Lester Prynne is flaunting his scarlet H, but the production transcends its provocative purpose. In Douglas Stein's punk, high-tech environmental setting—a compound of neon, cellophane, and vinyl—Woodruff produces an anthology of 1970s experimentation, from Lee Breuer's shadowgraphs to Robert Wilson's slow-motion imagery. This provides the engraver's acid with which the actors etch their stone-cold characters. The itinerant poet Baal, in Mario Arrambide's massive, brutal performance, becomes a popular rock 'n' roll performance artist, habituating decadent nightclubs. His celebrity is a source of erotic attraction for men and women alike. Love "is like biting into an orange with the juice squirting into your teeth," and he gets more than his share of the pulp in this world of relentless pleasure-seeking.

But Baal has no staying power. He tells the pregnant Sophie Barger (powerfully played by Anne Scurria) to throw her fat body in the river. Another jilted girl, Joanna, actually does manage to drown herself—Woodruff provides a large fish tank for the purpose—while Baal, indifferently watching TV, improvises a watery poem (the haunting verses appeared later in Brecht's *Hauspostille* as the "Song of the Drowned Girl"). Having murdered his male lover Ekart, Baal finds himself "alone again, in my own skin." In a forest, woodsmen ominously sharpen their axes. Toothless, reviled, and spat upon by his enemies (he enjoys the taste), Baal dies amid urine and offal, having entered nature as the excrement of God.

Strong stuff all right, and strongly delivered—especially in the first part, before the show gets jaded, along with its characters. Writing under Rimbaud's influence, Brecht is committed to a complete disordering of all the senses. Woodruff tries to disorder ours as well—not exactly what the average spectator seeks in an evening's entertainment. Yet just as people are characterized by their decisions, so a theater is characterized by its choice of plays. This degenerated, ecstatic *Baal* reaffirms the courage of the Trinity Rep.

The Steppenwolf Company of Chicago is identified by an entirely different kind of production—realistically acted, socially committed, emotionally accessible—which may be why so many of its actors and products have entered the mainstream. It is not surprising to find its epic production of **The Grapes of Wrath** on Broadway, though its fate is uncertain. Recently ensconced at the Cort Theatre to high critical praise, the Steppenwolf production doesn't seem to be drawing an audience. I'm sorry about that, although not entirely surprised. The production is admirable, but like most Broadway shows, the play is seriously out of date.

With economical means and considerable imagination, Frank Galati (the director and adapter) has created a conceptually brilliant work, brimming with integrity and extremely well acted. Still, the play seems extraneous, except as an homage to Steinbeck's inspirational novel about an Oklahoma family's odyssey to California in quest of migratory work. Possibly the production is meant to suggest parallels with the plight of today's homeless and dispossessed. But one quick look at the sidewalks of New York is enough to show how inadequate are the author's eulogies to the indestructibility of the "little people."

Like Brecht's Mother Courage, Steinbeck's Joads display what Tillich called the "courage to be" in the face of circumstances that would otherwise suggest extinction. But Brecht had the artistic sense to endow his heroine with the complicated moral qualities enjoyed by all humanity, while Steinbeck (as Lionel Trilling observed) makes poverty synonymous with nobility, wealth with malevolence. To dispense vices and virtues according to income is the stuff of Marxist melodrama—not an uncommon form in the thirties, but unacceptable even to the Soviets today.

Equally ennobled in *The Grapes of Wrath* are the union organizers. Although nobody will deny the historical importance of the labor movement, it is unlikely to excite such unqualified admiration in the minds of contemporary audiences. For every idealistic Cesar Chavez advancing the interests of the fruit pickers, there have been at least fifty fat-cat, mob-related Jimmy Hoffas stealing from pension funds, and the occasional goons with baseball bats sent to bully their own constituents. One looks a little wryly at the sacrifice of Steinbeck's Preacher Jim Casy in light of the future development of the movement he died for. (The same problem blights our appreciation of Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*.)

The Grapes of Wrath, therefore, has value largely as fable—the American family holding together against all odds. It is also a mythical evocation

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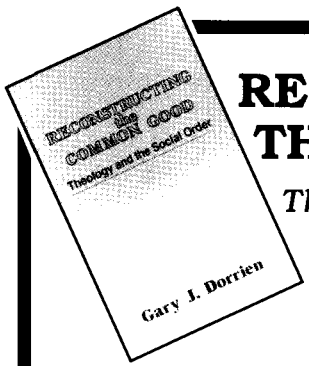
of a more innocent age, when our hopes for social reform had not yet foundered on the rocks of violence, greed, and selfishness. These dark qualities are abundant enough in Steinbeck, but seem shadowy and aberrant. More prominent are resounding affirmations of social optimism and human goodness. Modeled on Exodus, featuring a trek halfway across the nation to find the Promised Land, the story supports enough catastrophes to daunt the most intrepid Moses—evictions, floods, murders, and mayhem. Yet its characters remain forever indomitable. "We're the people that live," says the indomitable Ma Joad, "and we ain't goin' to get wiped out. We're the people that go on." And the indomitable Tom Joad, affirming that "a man's gotta do what he's gotta do," adds, "Wherever there's a cop beating up a guy, I'll be there." All this indomitability is heart-stirring, but the homely wisdom tends to grow a bit sticky. And I ain't seen many Tom Joads around lately protesting police brutality.

One must resist the impulse to parody this work, and it's to Galati's credit that he takes it so seriously. Indeed, that's why the production works. Enacted on a simple platform with five inner prosceniums suggesting infinite space where the actors form images from paintings by Hopper, Wyeth, and Grant Wood, the action proceeds against a country-and-western aural surround performed on guitar, violin, and Jew's harp. Only an unfortunate piece of choreography out of Agnes de Mille's *Oklahoma!* mars the mood of authenticity. The focal image is a truck—employed like Mother Courage's wagon as the mobile home containing all the possessions of the itinerant characters. And as with Courage's wagon, the truck's inhabitants are gradually decimated by fateful happenings.

Galati's other image is water—the great Colorado River in which the characters playfully disport, and the frightening flood that threatens to evict them from their temporary home. (I haven't seen so much rain on stage since *The World of Suzie Wong*.) But the most striking image in the play is the pastoral Pietà that ends it, where Rose of Sharon, her infant having died in childbirth, offers her breast to a starving man. That the unemployed suckler on stage is black—and that earlier in the play the migratory Okies share a camp fire with other black people—ignores the fact that segregation was still very much in force in Depression America, even among such virtuous models as the Joads. But historical accuracy is clearly less important in this production than ideals of non-traditional casting and racial togetherness.

In any case, the actors perform with such sincerity and conviction that you tend to ignore such anachronisms, and if the definitive John Ford movie is not quite obliterated from memory, the play creates more of a sense of journey in its panoramic picture of poverty. Gary Sinise's laconic, wide-eyed Tom Joad is less appealing than Henry Fonda's but somehow seems more authentic, though Lois Smith's vaguely neurotic Ma Joad lacks the maternal stoicism of Jane Darwell. I also liked Terry Kinney's Jim Casy without losing my affection for John Carradine's sly old preacher in the film. And Lucina Paquet and Nathan Davis added cartoon amusement as Granma and Grampa.

So, qualified congratulations to Frank Galati and Steppenwolf for committing so much artistry to such an obsolete project. Since Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*, we have experienced corrupt unionism, World War II and the Holocaust, Korea and Vietnam, desegregation and race riots, political assassinations and abdications, Watergate and Iran-contra, ten years of conservative politics, the death of liberalism, and the dismantling of the many advances of the New Deal. One can hardly demand historical foresight from a writer. Still, Brecht did predict the coming of the Nazis, and truly great works of art manage to stay alive, regardless of how history misbehaves. •



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The secret, respectable world of Naguib Mahfouz.

The Human Comedy in Cairo

BY AMITAV GHOSH

I.

In Egypt, the news that the writer Naguib Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1989 was greeted with the kind of jubilation that Egyptians usually reserve for soccer victories. Even though the fundamentalists sounded an ominous note, most people in Cairo were overjoyed. Months later everybody was still full of it. People would tell anecdotes about how the good news had reached Mahfouz. Swedish efficiency has met its match in Cairo's telephones: the news had broken over the wires before the committee (or whatever) could get through to Mahfouz. He was asleep, taking his afternoon siesta (no, it was early in the morning, and he just hadn't woken up yet), when his wife woke him and told him matter-of-factly that somebody wanted to congratulate him for winning the Nobel (no, it was she who wanted to congratulate him, didn't you see the story in . . .).

The stories were on everyone's lips: tales of national pride and collective hope. Mahfouz has a large following in Egypt and is personally popular: he is everybody's slightly eccentric but successful uncle, a modest, generous, kindly man, who has spent over thirty years working as a civil servant. The rest of the Arab world was enthusiastic, too, including the people of some countries who had their own favorite contestants (it had long been rumored that an Arab writer would soon win the prize). The award to Mahfouz was clearly a recognition of the achievements of Arabic literature, and even if it was several decades overdue, the Arab world in general responded to it with pride.

It would have been interesting, at that moment of elation, if some enterprising pollster had taken it into his head to put two questions to a representative sample of the reading public in the Arab world. The first question being: "Do you think Naguib Mahfouz is the most interesting, innovative, or imaginative writer in Arabic today?" And the second: "Do you think that Naguib Mahfouz is the most appropriate candidate for the Nobel Prize for literature in the Arab world today?" It is my guess that the answer to the first question would have been largely "no," and the answer to the second would have been generally "yes."

In the gap between that "no" and that "yes" falls the award itself, and the extraordinary power it carries in countries like Egypt and India—old civilizations, trying hard to undo their supersession in the modern world. Once, in my own city of Calcutta, in the gaudy heat of May, stuck in a crowded bus in a traffic jam, I overheard an unexpectedly literary conversation. A sweat-soaked commuter, on his way back from a hard day's work, missed his grip on the overhead rail and dropped his briefcase on his toe. A dam seemed to burst: he began to complain loudly about the traffic, the roads, the fumes, the uncollected garbage. One of his neighbors turned to him and said sharply: "What are you complaining about? Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, and wasn't he from Calcutta?" At this very moment someone stuck in a bus or a share-taxi in Tahrir or Shubra or some other traffic-logged part of Cairo is almost certainly saying the same thing about Mahfouz. Thus does Stockholm regulate the traffic in Calcutta and Cairo.

In the United States, Mahfouz met with another kind of approval on the occasion of his triumph. The second paragraph of the *New York Times* story on Mahfouz's Nobel, carried on the front page, quoted Israelis declaring Mahfouz's politics to be perfectly acceptable. His work, his concerns, and his subjects came a poor second to this other aspect of his newsworthiness.

For a prize of such power, the ordinary standards of judgment that apply to books are held in suspension. What matters is that the writer's work be adequately canonical, which is to say, massive, serious, and somehow a part of "world literature." If Mahfouz won on these counts, his was the victory of the decathlete, achieved by a slow accumulation of points rather than by a spectacular show of brilliance in a single event. To date, Mahfouz has written some thirty-five novels and twelve volumes of short stories, as well as several plays and screenplays; he is said to be widely read in philosophy and French literature; and he is credited with introducing absurdism and the stream of consciousness technique into Arabic literature. Whatever your opinion about any particular book of his, there can be no denying the weight of Mahfouz's contribution to modern Arabic literature. Thus the general popularity of the award.

Palace Walk
by Naguib Mahfouz
translated by William M. Hutchins and Olive E. Kenny
(Doubleday, 498 pp., $22.95)

The Beginning and the End
by Naguib Mahfouz
translated by Ramses Awad
edited by Mason Rossiter Smith
(Doubleday, 384 pp., $19.95)

The Thief and the Dogs
by Naguib Mahfouz
translated by Trevor Le Gassick and M. M. Badawi
(Doubleday, 122 pp., $16.95)

Wedding Song
by Naguib Mahfouz
translated by Olive E. Kenny
edited and revised by Mursi Saad El Din and John Rodenbeck
(Doubleday, 106 pp., $16.95)

Midaq Alley
by Naguib Mahfouz
translated by Trevor Le Gassick
(Three Continents Press, 246 pp., $11)

II.

Mahfouz was born in Cairo in 1911. His father was a minor functionary in the government, and he grew up in the heart of the old city: the crowded district that lies beyond the ancient university of al-Azhar and the mausoleum of the Prophet's grandson, Sayidna Hussein. In the years of Mahfouz's childhood, it was an area where respectable families of modest means, struggling to put their children through school, lived above thriving little shops and businesses and looked out through their dusty windows at medieval mosques, hospitals, and religious schools. This is the world that Mahfouz has made peculiarly his own: a distinctively Cairene world of minor civil servants striving to make ends meet on their salaries, to push their children one rung higher on the civil service ladder while keeping up appearances against the pretensions of pushy grocers and arriviste café owners. No matter that this kind of person has moved out of the neighborhood (as did Mahfouz's family): their

AMITAV GHOSH is the author most recently of *The Shadow Lines* (Viking).

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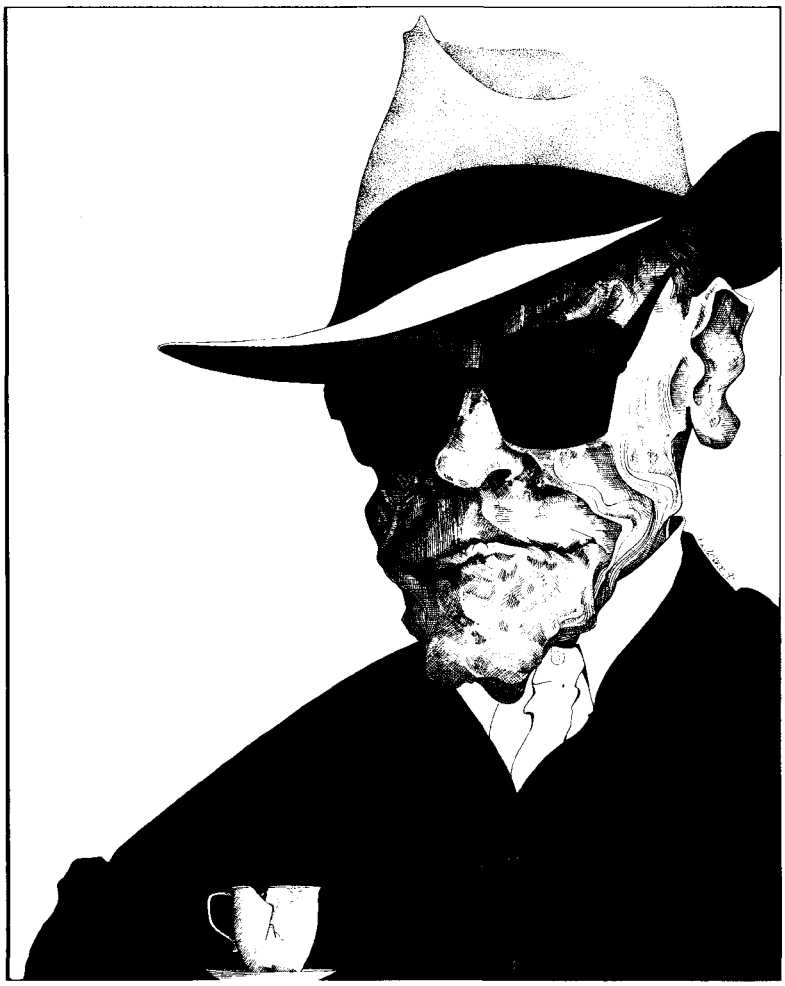
hopes and their anxieties remain much the same.

These are the people of Mahfouz's imaginative universe—a small, distinctive group within the tumult of modern Egypt. Rural Egypt, which occupied so much of the imaginations of Mahfouz's most illustrious predecessors and contemporaries, never intrudes on his world. Indeed, it is almost artificially excluded. His characters never even have friends or relatives in the countryside, as they almost certainly would in the "real" world. This needs saying, if only because Mahfouz's world is sometimes said to be a microcosm of Egypt. If this is so, it is surely only in that special sense in which the sansculottes of Paris were somehow a little more "the People" than the peasants of the Midi.

Much of the interest of Mahfouz lies in his avenue of entry into the world of his characters. He takes the most secret, the least accessible, route: the family. Of course, the family is one of the territories the novel has most successfully claimed for itself everywhere; all around the world there are novelists who, like Mahfouz, build their books on families and their histories, on the endless cycle of birth, marriage, and death. But in Mahfouz's hands, in the world of his People, this invitation into the family has an extra dimension of excitement.

In Egypt, and more generally in the Arab world, as in many conservative, traditional societies, the family is a secret, curtained world, protected from the gaze of outsiders by walls and courtyards, by veils and laws of silence. To be taken past those doors, into the forbidden space of failed marriages and secret desires, the areas that lie most heavily curtained under the genteel ethic of family propriety—and to be introduced into this by the most public of artifacts, a printed book—is to prepare oneself for the pleasurable tingle of the illicit. And once past that curtain, Mahfouz's reader discovers, with guilty delight, a quiet murmur of furtive gropings, dissatisfaction, and despair that confirms everything he has ever suspected about his neighbors. This is Mahfouz's particular talent: he has a fine instinct for discovering the fears, the prejudices, and the suspicions of his People, and serving them back to them as fiction.

In his hands, the intricacies of family relationships become a kind of second language, with which he demonstrates to his readers the dangers that lurk at the margins of their world. These are predicaments that they can all too readily imagine, since they form the nightmare Otherlife that gives their respectability its meaning. This is a world in which sisters become prostitutes to help their brothers become "respectable employees," where fathers who drink encounter their sons in brothels, where ambition is always unscrupulous and young men who look above their station come to a sticky end, where boys who are allowed to stay out too late are plunged "deep into sin and addiction" and eventually end up in a region that can only be described as Mahfouz's Underworld.



NAGUIB MAHFOUZ BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

That underworld is a landscape often encountered in his work, always sketched with portentous hints and suggestions, a region of pure fantasy, dank with the "odor of putrefaction," whose inhabitants always drink themselves into stupors, smoke hashish, fondle bosomy singers, and traffic vaguely in drugs. It is through devices such as these that Mahfouz invites his reader to marvel at the decay of the world as it should be. It is a sentiment that his People are only too willing to take to heart, oppressed as they are by the prospect of poverty and social decline on the one hand, and on the other by the images of wealth that they associate with those who control money and power in their societies.

The predicament is not peculiarly Egyptian. I can think of at least two eminent writers in Calcutta whose plots and material are uncannily similar to Mahfouz's, though Mahfouz is the more skillful practitioner of the craft. This is the kind of fiction that grows out of the sensibility of literate, urban, "salaried employees"—who, caught between a vast sink of poverty and tiny, impenetrable enclaves of wealth, begin to look for some kind of meaning and authenticity in what they see as their own traditions of respectable gentility. That is their cruelest delusion, for their gentility has very little to do with the traditions of Egypt or India, Islam or Hinduism, and everything to do with Victorianism.

Much of Mahfouz's work seethes with the indignation that grows out of this particular sensibility, indignation at the corruption that allows the unscrupulous to grow rich while decent people labor to earn an honest wage. But indignation is about all it is. Its sources are not interesting enough to give it the fire of real rage or even the anger of outraged morality. Mahfouz has written some quasi-mystical parables, but he is not essentially a religious writer. Indeed, the Arab thinker whose name occurs most frequently in his work is Abu'l 'Ala al-Ma'arri, a medieval freethinker and rationalist. And although Mahfouz has written political satires, he is not essentially a political writer, either. In his books politics and history generally serve as part of the background and mise-en-scène.

If there is something suspect, in the end, even about Mahfouz's indignation, it is probably because it never appears to

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be turned against his people's own ethic of respectability. His mother figures are impossibly good and forbearing, and girls who leave the sanctuary of the home and go out to work all too often fall prey to temptation. At its best, Mahfouz's work has some of the texture and the richness of detail of the nineteenth-century masters whose influence he acknowledges—Balzac, Tolstoy, Flaubert—but even at its bleakest and most melancholy (as in *The Beginning and the End*) his writing never approximates real tragedy. Its pathos seems to spring almost entirely from a sense of violated gentility. Even for a writer with Mahfouz's skill, it is hard to create tragedy out of the scramble for respectability.

It is in the observation of the small details on which the edifices of respectability are constructed that Mahfouz is really acute about his society. Those are the details that need footnoting in this selection of translations—not the "sights and smells of Cairo," as his editors have all too predictably assumed. What the foreign reader needs explained is the real meaning of what it is to be a "salaried employee" in Egypt, the importance of the baccalaureate examinations, what it is to be an eighth-grade functionary. These are arcane and peculiarly Egyptian details, although they have nothing to do with the Egypt of the Pharaohs or Mamelukes, or with anything particularly exotic. But it is those details that make up the fabric of respectable, middle-class life in Egypt, and it is Mahfouz's singular gift that he is able to transform them into the stuff of fiction.

III.

The American University in Cairo Press has long been doing a difficult and thankless job in making good writing in Arabic available in English translation. With Mahfouz's Nobel Prize, and the sale of rights to their translations, their efforts have been richly rewarded. It is to be hoped that more and still better translations will be forthcoming soon, so that a wider spectrum of modern Arabic writing will receive the kind of attention it deserves. The four novels published by Doubleday are revised versions of the original American University in Cairo translations. Two of them were written in Mahfouz's early "realistic" period. *The Beginning and the End* is the melancholy but compelling story of a family pauperized by a sudden death. *Palace Walk* is the first book of Mahfouz's Cairene trilogy, written in 1956-57, in which each book is named after a street in the old city. The trilogy, which charts the history of a Cairene family during the period between the wars, is a chronicle of the changes that occurred in Egyptian society over that period.

Palace Walk sets the stage for the later books; it is a depiction of what went before the changes, so to speak. The central figure in the book is a patriarch of rather extreme convictions: he has never once, in their decades-old marriage, allowed his wife to leave the house. This is a condition with which she is entirely satisfied, for she reveres her husband, except for one small thing—she longs to visit the mausoleum of Sayidna Hussein, which is down the road. One day one of her sons persuades her to venture out. She does, and for her pains she is struck by a motor car. (Why do such terrible things happen, in Mahfouz's work, to women who leave their houses?) Worse still, the wrathful patriarch, upon discovering her dereliction, packs her off to her mother's, where she languishes, wringing her hands, until he summons her back. In the end, however, the turmoil of Egyptian politics—the last part of the book is set in the period of the 1919 riots against the British presence in Egypt—catches up with the apparently invincible patriarch and leaves him a broken man.

The novel has the feel of the sort of stories people tell about the Old Days, when they want their children to marvel at how much the world has come on since then. In a sense, of course, it is exactly that: Mahfouz was a very young child in the years in which his book is set, and his family had already moved out of the old part of the city. There are some perceptive observations about the psychology of patriarchy—there is a wonderful scene, for example, in which the patriarch's son, a brave and ardent nationalist, finds himself reduced to a quaking heap by the tone of his father's voice. But the reader would be better able to savor those moments, perhaps, if Mahfouz's sympathy with the patriarch were not so patent, if the book were not so much pervaded by nostalgia for a time when Men were Men.

The other two novels, *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961) and *Wedding Song* (1981), date from Mahfouz's later period, which was less realistic and more experimental, and they are, frankly, awful. When the spirit moves Mahfouz to be technically adventurous, it also tends to push him away from his accustomed material, leaving him stranded in various exotic enclaves of society. *Wedding Song* is set among a group of raffish theater people who Drink, Gamble, Take Drugs, and Have Sex (the underworld, again). A particularly disreputable couple has a son who is an idealistic young man; appalled by the lasciviousness and the immorality of his parents' circle, he exposes them in a play before staging his own death. *The Thief and the Dogs* is about . . . well it's about an idealistic sort of fellow who becomes a thief because he is shocked by how rich some people are.

Unfortunately for Doubleday, and fortunately for English readers, the most delightful of Mahfouz's translated works, *Midaq Alley*, has long been available in a good translation by Trevor Le Gassick. It has recently been reissued by the Quality Paperback Book Club, and it is more worth reading than any of Doubleday's four. The novel is set in Mahfouz's familiar world—in a street in the old city—but it lacks the portentousness of some of his other work. It is written tongue-in-cheek, almost as self-parody, and it brims with moments of pure delight.

For instance: the homosexual café owner Kirsha—inevitably of dark and sullen aspect—is interrupted by his wife while entertaining a youth in his café. His wife marches up to the boy and screams: "Do you want to ruin my home, you rake and son of rakes. . . . Who am I? Don't you know me? I am your fellow-wife . . ." The boy escapes, and she turns upon her protesting husband and shouts, in a "voice loud enough to crumble the walls of the café": "Shut your mouth! You are the . . . lavatory around here, you scarecrow, you disgrace, you rat-bag!" Among the awestruck spectators is the baker's wife, who regularly beats her husband. She turns to him now and remarks: "You're always moaning about your bad luck and asking why you're the only husband who is beaten! Did you see how even your betters are beaten?" But eventually Kirsha has his say as well. "Oh you miserable pair, why on earth should the government punish anyone who kills off people like you?" His son declares that he wants to leave home and live in a place where houses have electricity. "Electricity?" retorts Kirsha. "Thanks be to God that your mother, for all her scandals, has at least kept our house safe from electricity!"

The inhabitants of this alley are a world away from the mythologized patriarch and his family on Palace Walk.

IV.

The Nobel Prize has had an unhappy consequence for Mahfouz. Soon after the announcement, possibly as a result of the Rushdie crisis, he began to receive death threats from Islamic fundamentalists. At issue was a book he wrote in 1959 called (in its English translation) *Children of Gebelawi*. It was an allegorical novel, in which three

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of the principal characters were said to represent the prophets Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. The *'ulema*, the Muslim doctors of theology and religious law, declared Mahfouz's book to be offensive to Islam. The book was never published in Arabic in Egypt, and for a while Mahfouz stopped writing altogether. But there were more books in time, and the controversy was largely forgotten—until the threats began.

An epoch passed in the Middle East between the late fifties and the late eighties. There is a world of difference between a group of learned scholars pronouncing an anathema and the death threats issued by bands of young men barely out of college. The evolution of the Mahfouz controversy is one very small indication of how dramatically the Middle East has changed within the lifetime of his own generation.

In Mahfouz's youth, Islam had been largely sidelined as a political ideology. In Turkey, Ataturk, with the power of the army behind him, appeared intent on pushing everything religious into the wings. During his college years in the late twenties and early thirties, the principal intellectual influence on Mahfouz was a group of nationalists who had set themselves the task of creating a national culture for Egypt that would be distinctively Egyptian. The path they took lay in emphasizing Egypt's Pharaonic and Hellenistic roots, to the point of disavowing all connections with the Arab and Islamic world. It was a time when everything was thinkable in Egypt and nothing was blasphemy.

If *Children of Gebelawi* had been written in those years, it would probably have passed without comment: every writer in Egypt, it would seem, was writing an allegory of some kind. But the book was written in the late fifties, when the political and religious climate in the Middle East had been profoundly altered by the establishment of Israel and then by the Nasserite revolution in Egypt. In Egypt, Islam acquired a new vitality and assertiveness, and the religious establishment was keen to remind everybody of that fact. But even then the *'ulema* followed procedure in condemning the book. There were no calls for bloodshed or retribution: just a clear message that those who persisted in the intellectual habits of the thirties would now have to contend with the doctors of religious law and their followers.

But now even the learned doctors are being slowly consumed by the fires that were kindled at that time. They have not the remotest connection with the bearded young men who now speak in the

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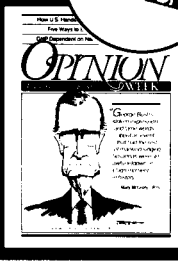

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name of Islam in Egypt: they have themselves been declared unbelievers, pagans—even the most learned of the *shaikhs* at al-Azhar, for centuries the theological center of Sunni Islam. In 1977 one of their number, Mohammad al-Dhahabi, a religious scholar and a minister of the government department in the Ministry of Religious Endowments, where Mahfouz worked for much of his life, was kidnapped and killed by a fundamentalist group called the Society of Muslims. At the subsequent trial, conducted by the army, the presiding general in so many words declared the *'ulema* incompetent.

The scholars' only recourse now is to call the preachings of the fundamentalists un-Islamic, as indeed they are by scholastic standards. The Society of Muslims have effectively scorned Muslim history: they have rejected all of medieval Muslim scholarship, including the great jurists who set up the four major schools of Islamic law, and they have also claimed the right to interpret the Koran. A century ago it is they who would have been counted the blasphemers, and any one of their current claims would probably have cost them their lives. They have, in effect, vacated the whole concept of Islam as we know it: for Islam is a history, as well as a doctrine and a practice. Yet today, for millions of Muslims in Egypt and elsewhere, it is they, and not the *shaikhs* of al-Azhar, who are the true Muslims.

The power of the fundamentalists has grown so phenomenally in Egypt over the last few years that they are now in a position to fight pitched battles with the police. Every so often they even claim to have "liberated" parts of Cairo and some other cities. Why, then, should these fundamentalists revive the charges brought against Mahfouz by their enemies, the learned doctors of religion? It must be the first matter on which they have been in agreement with them in several years. Mahfouz's book is evidently a pretext: their hostility almost certainly stems from his public support of the Camp David accords.

In responding to the threats against him, Mahfouz has shown an exemplary courage. Despite the ominous drift of the political life of his city, he has turned down the government's offer of bodyguards and has refused to change his life in any way. For the time being he appears to have faced down his enemies and shamed them into leaving him alone. In doing so, he has demonstrated the kind of heroism that is both the most necessary and the most rare in his volatile corner of the world: the quiet kind. •

Malls and Marx

BY EUGEN WEBER

The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project by Susan Buck-Morss

(MIT Press, 504 pp., $29.95)

Walter Benjamin was born in 1892, in a prosperous household of middle-class Berlin Jews. His father, Susan Buck-Morss tells us, was an investor in "innovative urban projects," including a department store and an ice-skating rink. Eventually his investments went awry, and the family's prosperity with them. Though he was of military age by 1914, the young Benjamin seems to have spent the war years at his studies. Before the war was over he had married, conceived a son, and also a dissertation. Earning a living posed no insuperable problems. His dissertation once approved, Benjamin planned to teach, though he looked forward to it with little enthusiasm, since it would cut into the time needed for reflection. He seems to have been as strongly drawn to universities as Kafka was to insurance companies.

But his dissertation, on the origins of German Baroque tragedy, was not approved. Rebellion against school and family, which took the form of thoroughgoing criticism of the bourgeois world in which he was raised, brought him close to Marxism and to the avant-garde: like his dissertation, products of the society he spurned. A typical scion of the bourgeoisie, Benjamin wrote. He lived erratically between Berlin and Frankfurt, and traveled widely. In Naples in 1924 he met Asja Lacis, a Bolshevik from Latvia, with whom he wrote an article about the town, representing the endemic and traditional local begging and swindling as "expressions of the specifically capitalist form of Naples's underdevelopment." He went to Moscow, where he was struck by "the vibrancy of collective fantasy." In Naples he ignored the historical context, in Moscow he ignored the language, in both he had Asja.

Benjamin separated from his wife, then divorced her. In 1933 he left Germany for good and moved to Paris, where he stayed until the city's fall in 1940 spurred him to cross to Spain, hoping to join his friends Adorno and Horkheimer in New York. Within a few days of crossing the Spanish border, he was dead: "from natural causes," said the Spanish police, "of an overdose of morphine" says the author, which is also what most of his friends believe.

At the Spanish border at Port-Bou, Benjamin carried a heavy briefcase full of manuscript: the *Passagen-Werk*, or Arcades Project. This was lost. But some thousand pages of fragments remain: notes, articles, essays, and some of the chapters Benjamin planned to use in a separate book on Baudelaire. (Those chapters are available in English as *Charles Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism.*) Buck-Morss has mined the remaining pile of notes and aphorisms, "this nonexistent text," to produce the present study, and a wonderfully imaginative reconstruction it is.

Her job is not easy, nor is her reader's. Benjamin the German intellectual sits in the Bibliothèque Nationale making notes for a book on nineteenth-century Paris as seen through its arcades. Buck-Morss the Cornell professor seeks to reinvent what he might have written. The result is poetic, and sometimes hermetic, convoluted, arcane. Benjamin was fascinated by detective stories; obviously Buck-Morss is too. She traces, selects, and scatters clues that, with a little help from the author, will bring the reader to understanding. But, like some detectives and like Benjamin, Buck-Morss is a surrealist explorer, her mysteries unraveled by intuition, revealed by illusion.

Benjamin pioneered the study of arcades: literally, passages cut within large building blocks from one road to another. Since the 1920s the arcade has been better known as a metaphor for a bourgeois world reflected in its "illusions": the luxury goods it offered, the window-shopping and mutual ogling it permitted. Since the 1960s Benjamin has become famous as one of the great protagonists of the literary industry that revolved around the deceptions, self-deceptions, or ideologies of the bourgeoisie. And the literary remains of this unfrocked bourgeois, this elegiac poet of a past he deprecated, have them-

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selves inspired a vast literature and much debate.

The galleries of nineteenth-century Paris were designed as a refuge from threatening traffic and streets without sidewalks. They became centers of trade in luxury goods, where decorative art was enthusiastically enlisted in the service of commerce, providing window-dressing and the lures of consumer society. These thoroughfares were the preferred hangout of a quintessentially Baudelairian figure: the *flâneur*, or stroller, as comfortable in galleries as the bourgeois in his *salon*; the shop signs, ornaments, displays as familiar to him as the furnishings of more stuffy quarters. Baudelaire reveled in being a *flâneur* and limned the species. (Benjamin wrote about it when he wrote about Baudelaire.)

By the 1920s, however, the *flâneur* was dead, killed by the decay of leisure (and, one should add, of the *rentier*). Arcades and their shopping bazaars were dead as well, killed by department stores. The stroller's marble-floor domain lay under the dust of history, its meretricious offerings turned to compost for social archaeologists to sift.

Like Benjamin searching for truth in the garbage heap of history, Buck-Morss cobbles together the rubble of Benjamin's notes and imagery to produce conjectures of what the Arcades Project was about. Her work, like his, is not history, and not quite philosophy; it is, instead, creative retrieval. Benjamin's immediate inspiration for the Arcades Project, on which he started work in 1927, was probably Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*, published in 1926, where factual accuracy counts less than surrealist suggestiveness. Aragon's night-walker does not cross or describe historical or geographical quarters, but a fairy-tale Paris full of magical encounters, as surreal as the arcades were going to appear to his admirer.

Benjamin had written a good deal before embarking on the *Passagen-Werk*, among other things a chronicle of his childhood in Berlin around 1900, in which he presented his youthful perambulations in Proustian terms, embellished by adult reconstruction of childhood fantasies. His themes were expectancy, misunderstandings, dreams. The Tiergarten zoo becomes a labyrinth, the city turns to heath, firemen are transmogrified into guardians of the fire, a butterfly chase evokes a primeval struggle between man and beast. The massive realities of his surroundings—homes, furniture—are fated to dissolve. As the child seeks to understand (and misunderstands) his experiences, animistic magic infuses and enriches the recollected past. As the child deforms (and re-forms) the world around him, a wealth of images leaves its mark on him, intuitions are soaked up for later interpretation. Looking back, one recognizes the theme of the *Passagen-Werk*: it represents an archaeology of a recent past—that of nineteenth-century Paris—as irretrievably lost, and as poetically retrievable, as Benjamin's own.

Marx had remarked (who would know better?) that his world produced more myths in a day than previous ages forged in a century. But it was Benjamin's contemporaries who offered practical examples of how to enlist myth in the study of society. Through the study of Renaissance art, Aby Warburg, whom Benjamin admired, was busy indicating the interpretative possibilities of myth, but also of microdetail and of unsuspected iconographic connections. Siegfried Giedion's work on nineteenth-century architecture was similarly heedful of contemporary mythologies. And Siegfried Kracauer, a good friend, embarked on the biography not of a human being, but an urban being: a *Stadtbiographie* of Offenbach's Paris, by way of the operetta, which Kracauer considered the culture's centerpiece. Why not a parallel reflection, then, on an equally emblematic urban phenomenon: the arcades?

It was arcades, Buck-Morss tells us (but it could have been Benjamin), that "in the nineteenth century housed the first consumer dream worlds." By the twentieth century, however, they had become "commodity graveyards, containing the refuse of a discarded past." Here was Benjamin's quarry: ruined monuments of bourgeois society, symbols that had lost their magic and now lay defenseless, open to reinterpretation. The glass and iron structure of galleries and arcades had made them the first international style of Modern architecture. Now their remnants offered an obsolete inventory of cultural fragments: fossils and clues, ostensibly for a social and cultural history of a nineteenth-century city, actually for a political morality tale. Benjamin was not, after all, a neutral observer.

Exciting as they might be for Benjamin, surrealists like Aragon seemed stuck in the realm of dreams. Rejecting obsolete cultural traditions is good, placing them in historical context is better. Mythologies must be dissolved in the space of history, where they can generate first revolutionary understanding, then revolutionary energy. That sounds a little daunting. Fortunately, as with other romantic anthro-sociologists, Benjamin's theoretical bark is more stodgy than his narrative bite. Emile Zola, too, had set out to work like a social scientist, when his soul lay with the Three Musketeers; he had tried to write like Claude Bernard, but ended up writing more like Eugène Sue. Benjamin was too aphoristic (and impressionistic) to stick too close to turgid Marxist jargon or practice.

Benjamin's shopping galleries are little enchanted worlds. His department stores harbor waves of shoppers that break against cliffs of goods. Under Benjamin's pen, the age that saw itself as the quintessence of modernity and progress is revealed as archaic: the site of an emancipation that failed. But it is also revealed as a gigantic farce, full of confusion, incoherent dreams, incongruous juxtapositions. Under conditions of capi-

Bach's Idiot Son

He plunks the fat string
on his father's gamba
and watches the sound
blur like a bee's wing:

how lucky to be alive,
to have slipped out somewhere
between stillbirth
and genius, to arrive

here in stubborn wonder
and neglect by a dry pot
in the winter-light.
In a near room, his father

plays the virginal—a ground
bass for the glory of God.
The music says that heaven exists.
The boy hears his own sound

vanish into his father's.
So too, the father's music
vanishes into the boy's:
his spoon and platter.

The clattering says that stars
listen: take me to the house
of doors and colors, lift me
over the carriage stair.

Lord give me talented sons,
the father thinks,
but then this is God's child,
the art of faith comes

easily to him. The father buries
himself in a broad chorale.
And all across Leipzig, the idiot
children are glad and needy.

Bruce Bond

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talism, industrialization had brought about a re-enchantment of the social world, a reactivation of mythic powers designed to camouflage exploitative reality. "The father of Surrealism was Dada; its mother was an arcade."

Benjamin's probing among discarded props of the parental dream-world reveals the nineteenth century as a wish fantasy. For many, nineteenth-century industry had replaced dearth with abundance. Benjamin suggests instead that nineteenth-century culture unleashed, for more people, an abundance of fantasies. Technological reproduction gave back what technological production had taken away: the capacity for experience—even for experience that Benjamin regards as delusive. The mass marketing of dreams became a growth industry, and novelty was its major stock-in-trade. Novelty was "the quintessence of false consciousness, the tireless agent of which is fashion."

"On the shore of a new Lethe that rolls its asphalt stream through the arcades," Benjamin's fashion faces life or, more precisely, death:

> For fashion was never anything but the parody of daily decked-out corpses, the provocation of death through the woman, and . . . the bitter, whispered tête à tête with decay. That is fashion. For this reason, she changes so rapidly, teasing death, already becoming something else again, something new, as death looks about for her in order to strike her down. She has given him tit for tat for a hundred years.

The arcades project was first conceived as "a dialectical fairy scene" of nineteenth-century lifestyles and material products. It would become a Marxian retelling of the Sleeping Beauty called to wake from the collective dream of "commodity phantasmagoria." We can guess what it might have been from the chapters on Baudelaire: a montage, as Benjamin liked to say, of small particulars, large quotations, iconographic references (rare then among historians, unknown to philosophers); a farrago of our hero's sharp perceptions and false notions.

The kind of insight associated with Benjamin is now so commonplace that the novelty of his vision is not at once apparent. We are not surprised to read that early photography mimicked painting, that the first railroad cars were built (and named for) coaches, that newly processed iron was used for ornament rather than structures. Or that few people, before buses, railroads, and trams, were ever put in a position of having to stare at one another for long periods without exchanging a word. Remarks like these, astute and novel in their time, reflect the influence of surrealist observation and the inspiration of comparative materialism.

But if Benjamin's gaze was sharp, his facts are often wrong. He refers to the paintings of Delacroix "avoid[ing] competition with photography." Yet Delacroix's greatest paintings (and all of Géricault's) precede the appearance of daguerreotypes in 1839. He speaks of fashion as specific to capitalist modernity, when we can find it flourishing in ancient Rome, during the Hundred Years' War, to say nothing of the tales of Charles Perrault. He attributes the more comfortable attire of the lower classes to the revolutionary spirit of 1789, when it was due to an even more revolutionary spirit of enterprise—to industry, and to the profit motive. He claims that Paris parks were still closed to ordinary folk in 1851, when they had been open to all since the Revolution. He explains "the dandy" as a creation of mercantile England, and his impassivity as that of the merchant, when in fact the dandy was aristocratic, and as detached from gainful employment as from other vulgar pursuits. He places Baudelaire, the decadent *grand bourgeois*, among the petit bourgeois; and he defines the aristocratic Lamartine's "class feeling as that of a peasant with a plot of land." He blames factory work for "disfiguring" and "masculinizing" working women, with nary a thought for those, more numerous, who slaved on farms, and who rued their large feet and bovine builds when they went up to town.

The trouble on this score was that Benjamin was neither a scholar with a historian's scruples nor a journalist trained to check his facts. Marxist prejudice could be as misleading as slipshod history. Benjamin disparaged a bourgeois press that turned literature into a commodity as typical of the distorting effects that capitalism had on literature. Yet feuilletons in the same bourgeois press featured Balzac, Dickens, even the subversive Sue. Capital concedes the political message, provided the messenger sells.

Buck-Morss, unfortunately, is in no mood to raise questions. Benjamin denounces the plenty and light of metropolitan Paris as a mirage designed to conceal the exploitation of productive labor, and Buck-Morss goes one better. Urban illumination characteristically obfuscated reality, she claims, dazzling the masses rather than aiding them to see clearly. That sounds clever. Still, most people, even simple people, know quite well that "fairylike" displays are illusory, much like stage performances. That does not prevent them from enjoying them.

Did big-city crowds arouse only "fear, revulsion, and horror," or sometimes excitement too, and exhilaration? Was prostitution "indeed an objective emblem of capitalism," or could it be found flourishing in pre-capitalist societies? And if accepting cash for literary work is prostitution (as Baudelaire frequently averred), how did Benjamin (or Baudelaire) expect men of letters to make an honorable living? On a private income, presumably. It was certainly considered more honorable, in the nineteenth century as before it, to inherit money or to marry it than to earn it. Labor was demeaning, as was cash compensation. We might remember that the pejorative connotation of the term "commodity" was coined at a time when only the deprived were supposed to covet goods. Benjamin does not reflect on all this. He is too busy commiserating with Baudelaire, who wasted a large fortune and who, like a gentleman, expressed reluctance to sell his poems in the marketplace.

Baudelaire mounted the barricades in 1848 to fight less for social justice than against his stepfather, General Aupick. One sometimes wonders what Benjamin was fighting for. No more than Baudelaire did he attempt to examine his principles, let alone to reconcile them with reality. He attacks the Popular Front, through whose years he lived in Paris, for its alleged betrayal of the working class. He understands the appeal of political formulas that combine national unity, patriotism, and consumerism, but he denounces their perfidy rather than their failure to deliver. He makes no attempt to evaluate the policies of allegedly working-class parties, or the demands they sought to fill. He shows no sense of the political situation of 1936 or 1938, no inkling that the French "working class" was terribly diverse, that industrial workers were not even a large minority of the country's population. Why should one minority's interest take precedence over another's? Because it represents History? That would take Benjamin back beyond Marx, to Hegel; but Hegel, he thought, was an intellectual brute.

Transitoriness, runs Benjamin's argument, is the key to that distant ice age of industrialism that the nineteenth century presents to true explorers, and fashion is the transitory experience par excellence. As Buck-Morss insists, "The ephemeral quality of the material world is charged with meaning." Paris had become a glittering showcase of material progress, a magic-lantern show of optical illusions. The debris of this industrial culture served to reveal the fragility of a social

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order, the hollowness of its conventions, quite literally the ruin of its monuments. Buns and bustles in one generation, bobbed hair and beach pajamas in another, all turn to archaic residue, leftover fossilized commodities, or dreams. Uncritical assumptions of progress get their comeuppance in time.

But so does uncritical Marxian analysis. In the arcades Benjamin discovers "the last dinosaur of Europe, the consumer." But the great saurians were quite well adapted for domination, had catastrophe not overwhelmed them. Consumers have proved lasting, too. Consumption has never been a serious socioeconomic problem. Distribution has been—and distributive justice so far appears to be—better served by a revised version of the system that Benjamin condemned than by failed versions of the system that he preferred. For Benjamin, arcades were consumer "dream houses" in the service of commodity worship. Worshiping commodities is as silly as worshiping other false gods (will the true gods please stand up?). Still, if one is to pursue something, it might as well be washing machines, gas stoves, and bicycles, none of which does harm, all of which make life a bit easier—which is more than can be said for the labor theory of value.

And advertising, which Benjamin savors for its absurdity but denounces for its transformation of information into propaganda, is not so bad either. Surprisingly, Benjamin offers no observation on the color that posters brought into drab streets and that commercial calendars brought into bare dwellings, let alone on their role as carriers of avant-garde art. And there is more. "The advertisement," true enough, "is the cunning with which the dream imposed itself upon industry." But it is also the trick by which industry came to sell more, and hence more cheaply. Without publicity, mass access to consumption would have been slower and even more incomplete. Assuming the happy mean to be a fiction, is the excess of dearth preferable to those of publicity and consumption?

All this fussing with myth, in sum, does not bring us closer to reality. It leads away from it. Benjamin's celebration of myth, his reliance upon myth as a category of critical analysis, was worse than occasionally misleading poesy. It carried forward the nineteenth-century fiction, forged by Ernest Renan and enthusiastically endorsed by the forerunners of the racists whom Benjamin fled, that the invention of revelatory myths was an Aryan specialty.

All this does not make Benjamin's work less exciting, or Buck-Morss's reconstruction of it less admirable. In an afterword more moving than the text, Buck-Morss refers to the book that Benjamin never wrote as one "which might now be valued by our own generation as not only the most important cultural commentary on modernity, but one of the greatest literary achievements of the twentieth-century." One does not have to go that far to appreciate the novelty of Benjamin's approach, the originality of his rapprochements, the wit of his language.

Benjamin wanted to write a new kind of materialist history: a fairy tale "that disenchants the new nature in order to free it from the spell of capitalism, yet rescues all the power of enchantment for the purpose of social transformation." Though little social transformation will come of it, Buck-Morss has fulfilled her hero's purpose. Like Benjamin, she proceeds by selection. With a different selection from Benjamin's *nachlass*, she could have written a different book. It would have been as good, as plausible, as unconvincing, as suggestive, as this one. What more, in a relative world, can a writer ask?

EUGEN WEBER's *My France* will be published this fall by Harvard University Press.

Holy Tolerance

BY ANDREW DELBANCO

Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People by Jon Butler

(Harvard University Press, 360 pp., $29.50)

Many visitors have looked at the built landscape of the United States and concluded, not unreasonably, that religion must be a trivial feature of American life. St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, still a tourist stop, seems merely a parenthesis between Saks Fifth Avenue and Trump Tower. (Rockefeller Center, the real American cathedral, now Japanese, looms over it from across the street.) In Boston, Filene's is more of a tourist attraction than King's Chapel a few blocks away, or even than the old North Church from which Paul Revere received his instructions. And if you see an ecclesiastical-looking facade set back from a suburban street these days, it may be a condominium built around the preserved fragment of a demolished church—behind which sits not a congregation, but a doorman and twenty units with track lighting and hardwood floors.

And yet, as Jon Butler points out in his book on American religious life from colonization to the Civil War, the United States remains by some measures the most pious nation in the West. Ninety-seven percent of Americans still say they believe in God. Sixty percent regularly attend public worship—a figure roughly five times higher than the corresponding statistic for Europe. This apparently contradictory state of religious affairs—thin institutional structures with no affiliation to the state, yet abiding faith in the hearts of a great many Americans—has long been the object of puzzled consideration by students of our culture.

"Zeal," observed the émigré Frenchman Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur at the end of the eighteenth century, "in Europe is confined; here it evaporates in the great distance it has to travel; there it is a grain of powder enclosed; here it burns away in the open air and consumes without effect." A kind of "religious indifference" was what Crèvecoeur saw as the result of this evaporative process, but fifty years later his shrewder successor Tocqueville remarked that "there is no country in the whole world in which the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." The purpose of many modern studies of American religious life (Butler's is no exception) has been to explain how both these Frenchmen could be right.

In various moods of recoil from their own convulsed society, Crèvecoeur and Tocqueville found in America a realization of what their master Rousseau had called "civil religion." The American body politic, like Rousseau's ideal commonwealth, had at its core certain irreducible principles: the existence of God, belief in an afterlife in which virtue would be rewarded and vice punished,

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and the assurance of religious toleration. These ideas, according to the Founding Fathers, constituted the circle that circumscribed civilization. Within that circle, however, there existed a sometimes simmering, sometimes boiling mess of religious opinions, styles, rituals, and organizations—just the sorts of irreconcilable commitments that generated bitter conflict in the Old World.

The novel idea of the American republic was simply to let these religious factions alone—neither to grant any of them the allegiance of the state, nor to permit them to aspire to become the state. But such salutary "religious indifference" could only be achieved if the larger culture supplied itself with a repertoire of symbols and traditions that would elevate the basic principles of "civil religion" above the contentious creeds. In this way, the acerbities of religious conflict could be neutralized; they might animate, discipline, and comfort needy souls in the free air of toleration without disturbing the social peace.

The great problem for political and literary intellectuals (they were often the same in the early republic) was to devise and to maintain a symbolic system—flag, music, mottoes, republican architecture, popular myths and fictions, regular political rituals, sacralization of the landscape through public monuments—upon which the nation could subsist and flourish. These symbols had to command the allegiance of the people more powerfully than any competing symbol system, including Christianity itself.

By and large, this arrangement has worked well. A good deal of American history can be told as the story of how we have gotten from the idea that the establishment of religion is the true meaning of civilization to the idea that civilization is threatened by religious establishments. Even today every national political figure must prove his personal piety even as he offers proof of his indifference to everyone else's. Dwight D. Eisenhower made perhaps the clearest statement in modern times of this position—clear, that is, in its very muddledness: "Our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith—and I don't care what it is." His marvelous combination of reverence and contempt for the integrity of religious belief is a long way from the more internally consistent opinion of the first American Protestants, who were sure that anyone "willing to tolerate any Religion ... besides his own ... either doubts of his own, or is not sincere in it." A good deal of American political history has played itself out in the intellectual territory between these two statements.

But the fact is—this is what primarily concerns Butler and other religious historians—that the boundaries between private religious passion and the generalized pieties of "civil religion" are often permeable and unstable. There is always some intercourse between the two; and sometimes, when one spills into the other, the resulting mixture can be volatile. This has most obviously been the case at certain tumultuous moments in American history: from the "Great Awakening" of the eighteenth century—which Butler believes was really a series of discrete local events that historians have wrongly imagined as a coherent national phenomenon—to the religiously inspired abolitionist, Sabbatarian, and temperance movements of the nineteenth century, to the progressive, civil rights, and "countercultural" movements of the twentieth. The last conspicuous version of this impulse (in the 1960s) was perhaps not obviously an expression of Christian piety, but, especially in its appeal to young people looking for release from guilt and for the sanctification of desire, it resembled what an earlier age would have called a "revival." It is a pretty safe prophecy that sooner or later such an outburst of anger and disgust at the sterility of secular life will again transform the churches and the universities, and American life generally.

Butler stops at the Civil War, but his book makes a general contribution to our understanding of such transactions between public life and the lives of ordinary believers. He surveys a wide range of religious styles and practices—from formalized worship in churches to rattlesnake-gazing, reliance on divining rods, communication with the spirits of the dead, and the like. To accommodate all these phenomena under the single rubric of religion, Butler must provide a rather elastic definition of the term. Religion, he says, is "belief in and resort to superhuman powers, sometimes beings, that determine the course of natural and human events." He recognizes that it is a mistake to rely entirely on the study of institutions, or on published expressions (tracts, sermons, manifestos) for insight into the religious life of any culture. These are more properly the materials for the study of theology, which is a thing quite distinct from religion.

With this distinction in mind, Butler rightly stresses the persistence over several centuries of such phenomena as astrological prophecy, witchcraft cults, separatist movements stirred by charismatic leaders who claim intimacy with God. Such currents of belief have always flowed outside the visible institutions that are meant to direct them. Butler argues, for instance, that although the Anglican authorities in colonial America effectively transformed both rural and urban landscapes into a vista of church spires and towers, their "capacity to erect buildings was never matched by success at building authoritative institutions." This is both a true statement and a formulation that those Protestants who dissented from the Anglican establishment would cheerfully approve, since their concept of "church" had nothing to do with an ecclesiastical structure in which authority is hierarchically dispensed, and certainly not with any merely physical structure.

A church, in the evangelical tradition that has played such an important role in American history, means a coming together of believers into fervent communion—not a material entity of four walls and a roof. As Butler documents, the religiosity of Americans has never correlated very well with the numbers of ecclesiastical buildings: between the Revolution and the Civil War roughly 50,000 houses of worship were erected in the United States, yet only about one in three Americans "sustained a regular relationship" with any one of them. In finding such evangelical themes—the itinerancy of preachers, the privatism and the restlessness of the laity—ratified by the facts of American history, Butler expresses, I think, a personal affinity with the reformed tradition. He has written a book that is, in part, a celebration of the tenaciously extra-institutional character of Christianity in the New World.

Still, the most interesting aspects of the American religious experience, and of Butler's book, are the shifting ways by which Christian piety—in the literate, doctrinally explicit forms of institutional religion, and in the chiefly oral and performative energies of revivalism—affects, and is affected by, secular politics. Some of Butler's most powerful pages come in his chapter titled "Slavery and the African Spiritual Holocaust," which documents the chilling efficiency of the unholy partnership between Christianity and what used to be called "the slave power." First that potent combination almost obliterated the religious traditions that Africans had left behind, and then it tried to inculcate in them an ideology of subservience and tractability. It fostered an entire worldview (for slavemaster as well as slave) in which what was crooked could be made to look straight, and what was filthy could be made to look clean.

Christianity also played a central role, of course, in the anti-slavery movement.

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John Brown patterned his life on the martyrdom of Christ, and much of the abolitionist fervor (witness such books as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) expressed itself as a calling to save the souls of the slaveowners as well as of slaves. What this meant was a division in American religious life that ran along the same fault lines as those in economic and political life—a fact that must be grasped if one is to understand the full bitterness of what was not just a civil war, but also a religious war.

Such an unbridgeable cleavage in American Christianity had not broken open before, and has not reopened since, though it did recur in far less violent ways during the civil rights controversies of the mid-twentieth century. The more usual state of affairs in America (usual but still odd, from the contemporary European point of view) has been the cooperative relation between a comparatively tranquil world of diverse Christian denominations and the single, consensual "civil religion" of democratic politics. Without addressing himself explicitly to this relation in any theoretical terms, Butler illuminates its origins. We see, for instance, the strange devotion of evangelical Christians to the cool deist Thomas Jefferson—who, because of his indifference to what they most cared about, the personal Christian God, became the defender of their separatist rights. We see how, with the proliferation of denominations after the revolutionary war, "Christianity recovered from the American Revolution with remarkable alacrity."

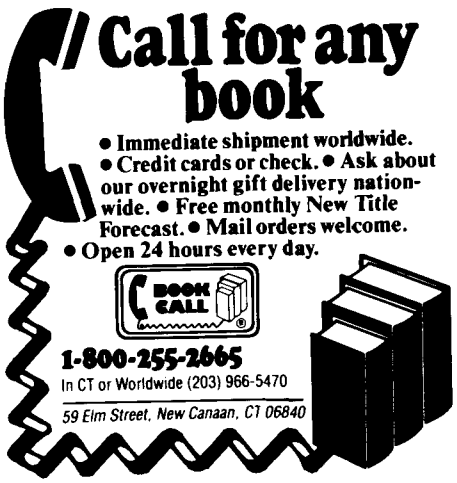
That recovery is worth remarking because any such revolution was, after all, a potentially anti-clerical affair. Anglican efforts to establish a bishop in the American colonies had unleashed a good deal of rage in the prerevolutionary years, and even in New England, where the established religion was congregationalism (and thus free of the monarchical taint), there were many reluctant revolutionaries and some outright Tories among the clergy. Yet by and large the Revolution embraced the energies of religion. The tomb of the great revivalist George Whitefield was raided for bones and bits of clothing—relics that inspired discouraged American soldiers to fight on against the crown.

The fight, of course, was carried out not in the name of Christ, but in the name of natural rights. This kind of paradox—a war for Enlightened Republicanism waged by avowedly Christian soldiers—always presents itself when one tries to sort out the relations between Christian and Enlightenment traditions in the United States. They cannot be disentangled. The push toward disestablishment after the Revolution did not grow from "religious indifference" or from antagonism toward the basic tenets of Christianity. It came, instead, from religious men like the Baptist leader Isaac Backus, who was passionate about his faith, as well as from figures like James Madison, who was educated in both evangelical and Enlightenment traditions, but whose approach to human affairs was based less on piety than on rationalist skepticism. Madison's animus toward established religion, most explicitly formulated in his *Memorial against Religious Assessments* (1785), reflected both his view of religion as essentially a private and voluntary commitment and his managerial, pragmatic view of politics, which later suffused the Federalist Papers and the Constitution itself. Disestablishment took hold in the young country because it was the best choice for virtually everyone—for Backus and Madison alike.

Butler is somewhat less illuminating in his efforts to penetrate the fundamental mysteries of the religious appeal in American life. Like many worthy books before this one, Butler's book comes up against the obstacle of explaining such elusive phenomena as the periodic rise and fall of religious fervor and the unpredictable intrusions of religious power into civic life. We have seen this in our own time, in the suddenly transforming presence on the political scene of black and white evangelicals. Butler is aware of how difficult it is to understand why collective religious sentiments seem to wax and wane; he points out how angrily historians have argued, reversed themselves, reformulated their analytic categories, and still found little common ground of agreement on such questions as why, or even when, certain occult beliefs—notably the belief in witchcraft—became "folklorized," or "confined to the poorer, more marginal segments" of society.

No doubt Butler is right about the difficulty of arriving at a clear understanding of such changes, but the vigor of the debate is in itself a healthy sign for American historiography, which has not always taken religion as seriously as it should. The details in our picture of popular religion—as it is being assembled by historians like David D. Hall, Eugene Genovese, Sean Wilentz, and Butler himself—remain in dispute. But the important step forward for the writing of American history is that the transformative power of religious belief has been recognized as continually active, not merely as a backdrop or seed for the relentless process of secularization.

As these investigations proceed, the problem of the relation between traditional and civil religion will certainly remain one of the pressing questions. Recently Garry Wills pointed out how the language of sin remains alive, in the waning years of the twentieth century, in sectors of our society from which many intellectuals turn away with nothing more than an automatic shudder. As Jimmy Swaggart rails publicly in the afternoon against concupiscence and in the evening watches privately as his favorite prostitute masturbates, what looks to some Americans like the exposure of his hypocrisy looks to many others like courageous penance for a grave sin, like an exercise in redemption. There is a sense in which the symbolic world of Jimmy Swaggart is holding its own better than the symbolism of civil religion.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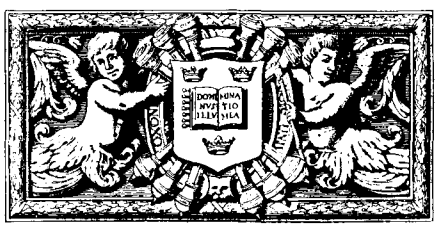

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In the 1960s, when younger Americans in particular regarded the symbols of civil religion as distorted or dead (think of Jimi Hendrix's dissonant version of "The Star Spangled Banner"), the sociologist Robert Bellah published the essay that has given the concept a new currency in our time. Bellah's essay on civil religion was delicately poised between admiration for its potency and anxiety about its future. Twenty years later, in a book titled *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Bellah made clear how he thought the balance had tipped: it was a full-scale jeremiad, a picture of ordinary Americans wandering about bewildered in the absence of common beliefs to link them with one another.

One can hardly doubt the force of such a jeremiad now, in the age of "a thousand points of light"—a pretty tawdry metaphor for the big job of concealing greed and public irresponsibility behind the idea of distributed virtue. Perhaps the most vivid representation of how the symbolism of American culture has changed is the striking juxtaposition of the Lincoln Memorial with the Vietnam War Memorial that lies on the Mall at Lincoln's feet. Adorned with the undecorated names of the dead, the Vietnam War Memorial is a powerful expression of contemporary American life precisely because it is denuded of the old symbolism—no sculpture, no pomp, no images of striving.

Whether the idea of a cohesive national enterprise devoted to democratic principles can be revived, or if not, what will supplant it, is anybody's guess. Americans now watch as the Soviet Union undergoes an extraordinary upheaval in which its political symbols are failing not least because of a resurgence of religious and nationalist feeling. This is both thrilling and frightening. Jon Butler's book reminds us that religion has always—in the United States, too—drawn on fear as well as hope, especially at times of social drift. One can only wish that when the old religious energies reassert themselves in our own culture, they will come as charity and love, not as demon-hungry reaction.

ANDREW DELBANCO is professor of English at Columbia University and author of *The Puritan Ordeal* (Harvard University Press).

Canada Wry

BY PEARL K. BELL

Solomon Gursky Was Here by Mordecai Richler

(Knopf, 413 pp., $19.95)

Mordecai Richler once ruefully remarked that "To be a Jew and a Canadian is to emerge from the ghetto twice, [because] self-conscious Canadians, like some touchy Jews, tend to contemplate the world through a wrong-ended telescope." To be a Canadian-Jewish novelist compounds the problem. Throughout his literary career, Richler has gnawed obsessively at the bone of Canada's inferiority complex, the self-denigration and the bleak sense of being a nation of losers outdistanced on every level by its American neighbor.

How can a Jewish novelist in Canada ever hope to be regarded as the equal of Bellow, Malamud, or Roth? What can a writer born and raised in the Jewish community of Montreal draw on as his own national ground—unless, like the Canadian-born Bellow, he moved across the border when young—to distinguish himself from the American novelists who have absorbed the Jews for themselves?

In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1960), still the best of Richler's nine novels, he managed to remain free of that desperate compulsion to prove he was as good as any of *them*. If the world he wrote about was the familiar one of every Jewish bildungsroman, Canadian or American, he could still bring a fresh voice and comic brio to his sardonic, tender, and scalding portrayal of a frenetically ambitious scoundrel and his working-class Jewish family. Duddy Kravitz is determined from childhood "to be somebody." Budd Schulberg's Sammy Glick was driven entirely by his lust for ruthless self-aggrandizement, but what made Duddy run and cheat and grab was his grandfather's warning that a man without roots is nobody. "Remember that, Duddel."

Sammy Glick loved no one but himself, but Duddy Kravitz adored his stern and righteous *zeyde*, and wanted him to be proud of his grandson. The trouble was the way Duddy went about becoming somebody. He hurled himself manically into unscrupulous schemes to get money: running a black market in American comic books, which were hard to find in Canada during the war; making preposterously artsy bar mitzvah and wedding movies; swindling the one friend dumb enough to trust him. Yet what made the novel more complex and provocative than a morality tale about the wages of greedy ambition was Richler's grasp of the conflicting strains—love and obligation, cruelty and resentment—of family life. Conniving finagler though he was, Duddy believed in his grandfather's imperative: "You've got to take them to heart, no matter what, they're the family, remember." What the *zeyde* cannot forgive is Duddy's betrayal of his friend. Richler gives a stinging authority to the rejection that ends the story.

The two novels that followed *Duddy Kravitz* were minor efforts, one set in the Canadian version of Madison Avenue, the other in England, but when Richler returned to the Jews of Montreal in *St. Urbain's Horseman* (1971) and *Joshua Then and Now* (1980) he seemed much less confident of his individuality and his turf. All the warmth and bitterness of the Jewish family, the affection and futility he had rendered with such poignant ambivalence in *Duddy Kravitz*, had been replaced by an odd mixture of contemptuous caricature and sentimentality. There are some hilarious moments in *St. Urbain*, when Richler takes deadly aim at "swinging London," where he lived for many years before returning to Canada, but the book doesn't survive the perils of rereading.

Joshua Then and Now doesn't even manage to be witty now and then. (It was later turned into a movie—screenplay by Richler, all too faithful to the book.) Richler on a roll doesn't know when to stop, and the joke becomes sniggering and spiteful when Joshua's mother entertains his bar mitzvah guests with a striptease. Richler made much better use of his comic talent in that moment in *St. Urbain's Horseman* when Jake Hersh, who has been living in London, comes back to Montreal for his father's funeral and feels an unexpected burst of affection for the dull homeland, "where to say 'Gentlemen the Queen' was to offer the obligatory toast to Elizabeth II, not to begin a discussion of Andy Warhol."

The problem for Richler is less what is Jewish that what is Canadian. Though

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Richler is marinated in his Jewishness, his grasp of what is distinctly Canadian in his work is unclear. In *Continental Divide*, a comparative study of the two societies, Seymour Martin Lipset notes the dominance in Canadian fiction of disparaging self-images, and argues that Canada's sense of inferiority, and the self-mockery it feeds, account in large part for the preponderance of comedy and satire in the country's literature. Lipset adds that this penchant for ironic laughter undoubtedly explains "the relative absence of serious, powerful heroes in Canadian art, the disproportionate presence of tragicomic losers."

In his new novel, Richler sets out to remedy this flaw by creating a hero so powerful that he crams several lives into one lifetime. Richler's impudent attention is fixed, yet again, on a Jewish family in Canada, but this time they're not working class, they are filthy rich, with a fortune founded on bootlegging during Prohibition. To make the story unmistakably Canadian, Richler has drawn on a part of the population that, until Alaska became an American state, was unique to Canada: Eskimos.

Early in his career Richler wrote a sputtering black comedy, *The Incomparable Atuk*, about an innocent Eskimo poet corrupted by a pop-culture tycoon, but the Eskimos in *Solomon Gursky* are a different kettle of smoked whitefish altogether. They're not just Eskimos, they're *Jewish* Eskimos. From their sealskin parkas hang four *tsitses* (fringes), each fringe woven, according to Orthodox law, of twelve silken strands. They keep kosher, and could starve to death on Yom Kippur because the Arctic sun at that season vanishes for months:

> Once the sun went down, they were obliged to remain celibate and fast until it rose once more several months later, not sinking below the horizon again for many more months. As a consequence, some sinned. . . . But most stayed in place to starve, dying devout, unless [a] good shepherd found them and hurried them south to the sun and deliverance.

The man responsible for this startling conversion was the Gursky family patriarch, Ephraim, grandfather of the bootleggers, who claimed to be the illegitimate son of a Russian baroness and the famous cantor of a synagogue in Minsk. When the cantor flees to England with his family after a pogrom, Ephraim, already a foxy rogue at thirteen, takes off on a brief but brilliant career as a pickpocket and pimp. Consigned to the convict's colony in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), the ever resourceful Ephraim somehow finds his way back to England, where he joins Sir John Franklin's polar expedition in search of the Northwest Passage. The actual expedition ended disastrously in the Arctic in 1845, and when the shocking news reached England of the crew's cannibalism, Dickens wrote a horrified play about it called *The Frozen Deed*.

In Richler's rewriting of history, this is not just any polar expedition, for the ship's company includes an assistant surgeon and his cabin boy who come aboard "lugging sacks of personal provisions. Six coils of stuffed derma, four dozen kosher salamis, a keg of shmaltz herring, and uncounted jars of chicken fat. . . . The assistant surgeon and the cabin boy are jabbering in some guttural tongue, which the third lieutenant takes to be a German dialect." But in the end only the crafty Ephraim and his fellow Jew Izzy Garber survive to tell the tale of the doomed expedition.

Eventually Ephraim settles down long enough to marry a nice Jewish girl in Alberta. Their son, Aaron, scrabbles a mean living as a peddler on the Canadian prairie, and it is Ephraim's three grandsons—Bernard the monster, Morrie the nebbish, and Solomon the charmer "destined for great things"—who parlay their bootlegging profits into a vast commercial empire: hotels, real estate, distilleries, you name it, it's not hard to guess that he has the Bronfmans of the first generation in mind. Richler's device for unraveling the fantastic and unsavory Gursky family history is a failed writer and hopeless drunk, Moses Berger, who for thirty years has been trapped in his obsession with the family, trying to write a biography of Solomon, who supposedly died in a plane crash in the Arctic sometime in the 1930s.

Not only is Solomon Gursky the powerful hero who has been missing from Canadian fiction, he also possesses the magical gift of metamorphosis. Emerging after his death into the thick of history, he reincarnates himself in many guises and in the unlikeliest places: with Mao Zedong on the Long March, next to Maureen Dean at the Watergate hearings, masterminding the Israeli rescue mission at Entebbe. Solomon compares himself to a raven, "full of lust, curiosity, and the unquenchable itch to meddle and provoke things, to play tricks on the world and its creatures."

In his most daring and mischievous impersonation, Solomon becomes the enormously wealthy and well-connected Sir Hyman Kaplansky, the pet Jew of London high life in the 1950s, turning up in all the gossipy diaries and biographies of the period, and all too willing to accommodate his British cronies by admitting that "some of his kind, especially those who sprang from Eastern Europe, were insufferably pushy." Sir Hyman dies by drowning, but by this point neither we nor Moses are fooled.

Obviously Richler conceives his Jewish knight of the realm as a man who knows exactly how to settle the hash of his anti-Semitic British pals. In an elaborate set piece, Sir Hyman invites some bigoted London celebrities—politicians, novelists, impresarios, actors—to a Passover seder at his Belgravia flat and offers them matzoh specially baked for him by a Whitechapel rabbi. As his hungry guests begin to munch the "unappetizing-looking biscuits . . . bumpy with big brown blisters," a warm, sticky red fluid dribbles down their chins and they scream, "It's blood, don't you know? . . . We're all covered in ritual blood!" As the blood-stained guests flee from the seder, their imperturbable host laughs his head off.

By the end of the novel, Moses Berger abandons the project that has tormented him for so long, knowing that his elusive quarry has outwitted the would-be biog-

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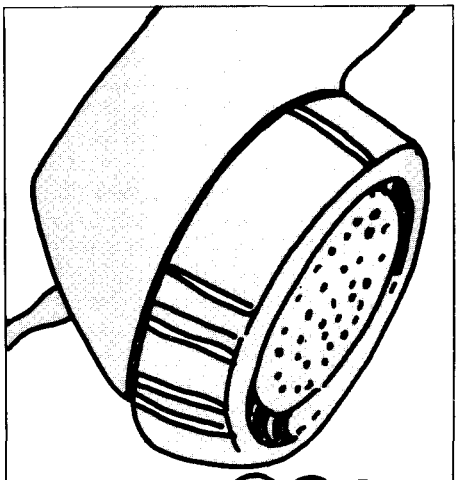

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rapher as craftily as he outwitted everyone who crossed his path. Moses has finally realized that the true story of Solomon is so unbelievable, so crazy, that it "could never be published unless he was willing to be carted off in a straitjacket."

Richler has written a long, untidy, often tedious mishmash of a novel, and it's hard to figure out what he is trying to convey. Is it the Jew as an intrepid man of action, defying the stereotype of weak passivity? But Solomon and his grandfather are hardly admirable. Ephraim is tough all right, and knows all about dogsleds and snow houses and how to survive in the barrens, but he's a crooked shaman, and Solomon in the heyday of bootlegging was just as corrupt as his brothers. Or is Richler mocking the ostentatious vulgarity of Jewish plutocrats, epitomized by Bernard's seventy-fifth birthday party, which ends with obligatory warbling of "Bei Mir Bist Du Shein"? But that stale cartoon has been done to death by now, and there's nothing fresh about Richler's reprise.

Or is he perhaps demonstrating the stubborn persistence of the Jewish faith, even in so hostile an environment as the Northwest Territories? But the Judaized Eskimos clearly have nothing to do with religion: they're supposed to be *funny*, but exactly why they are to be taken as a big joke is hard to fathom. The most puzzling figure in Richler's grand design is Solomon's son, Henry, a Hasid who reveres the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Though he inherited millions, Henry has chosen a life of rugged subsistence "at the northern rim of the world," in the frozen Northwest Territories, with an Eskimo wife whose cooking is glatt (that is, very) kosher. (Another turn of the same tiresome joke.) Presumably Henry is Richler's symbol of virtue and faith, a shaming contrast to the gross materialism of the other Gurskys. But how he became a Hasid, why he lives where he does—these mysteries are never resolved.

Unfortunately, there's nothing mysterious about Solomon's bloody seder: it's unforgivable. This most grave and ancient blood libel against the Jews is not the stuff of comedy. Even though it is meant to skewer the anti-Semites, Solomon's game is ugly. Not only does Richler not know when to stop, he doesn't know when to stop cackling.

What, besides those tiresome Eskimos, identifies this morally lopsided novel as Canadian? Robertson Davies believes that Canadians "lack a capacity for excellence and achievement, that they value mediocrity." Lipset points out that Canadian literature reflects a sense of defeat and a feeling that the country's history is uninteresting, while American writers "perceive their country in optimistic, triumphant terms, blessed by nature and events." (Of course, such generalizations look shaky the minute we think of specific writers and times—Faulkner, for one obvious example.)

Canadian writers seem unable to rid themselves of their chronic anxiety about their identity. Even a writer like Mordecai Richler, full of ingenious high jinks and aggressive comic swagger, feels compelled to drive the point home, in a novel about a "positive," even a gargantuan, hero. Yet this is to substitute myth-making for history and sociology, and the difficulty is that the myth does not work. As one of the few decent characters in the novel wearily remarks: "Canada is not so much a country as a holding tank filled with the disgruntled progeny of defeated peoples. . . . Most of us are still huddled tight to the border, looking into the candy-store window, scared by the Americans on one side and the bush on the other." Do the Eskimos know better, since they are both Canadian and Jewish?

PEARL K. BELL is a writer who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 4*

oughly astonishing moral: stupid pot smokers are more likely to fail at military service than smart ones.

JEFF SALAMON
Brooklyn, New York

Moving report

To the editors:

There have been so many extraordinary changes in Central Europe over the past six months that even the most incredible have become routine. But once in a while we receive word of a change so momentous that even the most jaded can't help being astounded. That was certainly the case with David Bell's report from Potsdam ("Money Votes," April 9), in which we learn that Potsdam and Berlin are now located "between the Oder and Brest-Litovsk." Since the Oder River has been the border between Poland and East Germany since 1945 and Brest-Litovsk is well inside the Soviet Union this is truly an astounding development for which not even the revolutionary changes since October have prepared us.

WILLIAM Z. TANNENBAUM
New York, New York

David Bell replies:

Oops. I meant the Elbe.

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Twin peaks

IF YOU'RE ONE OF MILLIONS OF Americans who don't immediately think of the words "wild" and "hip" upon seeing a copy of *Time* magazine at the dentist's office, then *Time* has important news for you. It has revived and retooled its "Grapevine" page with the young, irreverent reader in mind. Grapevine—a collection of short inside-politics items—now has a splashy layout, featuring colored boxes topped with wacky titles like "The Great Political Bozo Face-Off" and "Winner of the Week" and "Loser of the Week." There's also the "Morning Line," which lays odds on such prospects as Cambodian leader Hun Sen's downfall: "3 to 1. With the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Thais all squabbling over Cambodia, the country is rapidly going to Pol Pot." Yuk, yuk. All this devil-may-care mirth is an almost poignantly obvious response to *Newsweek*'s sustained quest for the title of coolest newsweekly. It started a couple of years ago, when *Newsweek* juiced up its "Periscope" section with the "Conventional Wisdom Watch" (of which *Time*'s "Winner/Loser of the Week" is a mutant clone); other offbeat Periscope features followed. The result hasn't been consistently great, but in general Periscope maintains a loose-jointed, savvy wit that Grapevine hasn't yet gotten the hang of. (A friend of mine, familiar firsthand with *Time*'s corporate culture, says the new Grapevine is an example of what happens when a hippopotamus tries to dance.) On the other hand, the very savviness of *Newsweek*'s jokes makes you wonder how many readers are getting them. In a "Rating the Sportscasters" Periscope box, Chris Berman of ESPN was called the "George Wendt of announcers." I'm willing to admit that I'm the only person in America who doesn't know who Chris Berman is, but I refuse to believe I'm the only one who doesn't know who George Wendt is.

WHY ALL THIS ZANINESS FROM magazines that for decades were pillars of sobriety? It's another symptom, apparently, of the long-running newsweekly identity crisis. This malady is typically attributed to media trends: the video revolution, finer segmentation of the magazine market, etc. I prefer a less-often-invoked explanation: twin peaks. (No, not the TV show—we'll come to that in a minute.) Income inequality in America (see cover) is growing. Mickey Kaus (see cover again) has reminded me that the attendant shrinkage of the middle class doesn't really yield a two-humped demography, a literal twin peaks; the monolithic bell-shaped curve of income distribution simply gets squatter. Nonetheless, some see this flattening, when mixed with the baby boom, the information economy, and assorted other all-purpose sociological explanations, as creating a cultural cleavage that poses marketers with a stark choice: go upscale or downscale; the middle won't hold. The standard example is Sears, which was forced to choose between the K-Mart and Neiman-Marcus models. *Time* and *Newsweek*, according to the twin peaks paradigm, face a similar choice: either stick with an audience of middle- to low-income solid citizens, or head for the smaller but richer-per-capita population of yuppie sophisticates. Or try to have it both ways: aim for middle America but throw in a page of must-read copy for young professionals in the know.

A MORE DARING ATTEMPT TO straddle the twin peaks can be seen in "Twin Peaks," the ABC-TV series created by weirdo genius David Lynch. (How weird, you ask? According to *Newsweek*, he once made a producer who was having a hysterectomy promise to send him her uterus.) In case you missed the first couple of episodes and somehow slept through the tidal wave of advance publicity, here's the story: The body of High School Homecoming Queen Laura Palmer washes ashore in the northwestern town of Twin Peaks, brimming with gruesome forensic evidence; it's clear that to solve the case we'll have to delve into her subterranean life of drugs and perversity. If you saw Lynch's masterpiece movie, *Blue Velvet*, you know that this is his home turf: Seamy Underside, USA. What surprised everyone about ABC's decision to invest in his worldview is that the number of true *Blue Velvet* fans is limited. If Lynch is to make it on network TV, he'll have to expand his avant-garde following to encompass a chunk of mainstream America.

THE TROUBLE IS, MANY OF HIS avant-garde fans consider his main accomplishment to be the ridiculing of mainstream America. *Blue Velvet* was, among other things, a parody—a parody of a detective thriller and of supposed small-town innocence. Now, it's possible to make a parody so subtle that it holds two audiences—the hip, knowing viewers and the unsuspecting fans of the very genre being lampooned. *Star Wars*, *Superman*, and *Batman* arguably fall into this category. But Lynch's parodies aren't exactly fine-grained. His work comes with an air of postmodern absurdity thick enough to clue even the unsuspecting into the fact that something is awry. So "Twin Peaks" can't be successfully ambiguous unless television somehow tones down Lynch's act. And it doesn't seem to have worked out that way. Consider a scene in the second episode involving Leo, a low-life trucker who is a subtly comic caricature of a domineering, abusive husband. Leo's wife, it seems, has lost one of his shirts. In a fit of rage, he puts a bar of soap in a sock, turns on the radio, which happens to be playing absurdly archetypal cowboy music, and then approaches the cowering Shelly while swinging the sock around lasso-style, complete with ridiculous whoosh-whoosh sound effects. "I'm going to teach you a lesson now, Shelly, about taking care of my property. That means making *sure* things aren't lost or damaged." Whoosh, whoosh; fade to black. If your sensibilities are a little skewed, and you're in the right mood, it's a very funny scene. But I doubt that all 14.9 million viewers were rolling in the aisles, and I doubt that the ones who weren't amused were naively absorbed in the drama of the moment. Besides, even if Lynch did manage the tricky technical feat of getting half of America to laugh at a case of wife abuse while the other half cried, that seems a little on the mean side, because it amounts to having half of his viewers laugh at the other half.

THIS ISN'T TO SAY LYNCH IS contemptuous of middle-brow viewers. Though his work subverts middle American values, it is suffused with an ethereal, perversely expressed affection for them. (Am I getting carried away? The word "suffused" is typically a warning sign.) And, to Lynch's (or co-creator Mark Frost's) credit, there are signs of an attempt to unite the two audiences, to let everyone in on the jokes. More than *Blue Velvet*, "Twin Peaks" uses conventional gags (e.g., the dizzy receptionist), and the absurdities are often expanded to sitcom breadth. The effect is sometimes questionable, but the aim seems laudable.

BY THE WAY, LAST-MINUTE RESEARCH reveals that George Wendt isn't the paragon of obscurity I had assumed. He's a regular on the globally beloved TV show "Cheers." Still, a survey of randomly selected TNR staffers shows that I was not alone in my ignorance. Maybe the American cultural landscape is best viewed not as two peaks, but as a huge mountain stretching from New York to Los Angeles and a dinky foothill in Northwest Washington, D.C.

ROBERT WRIGHT

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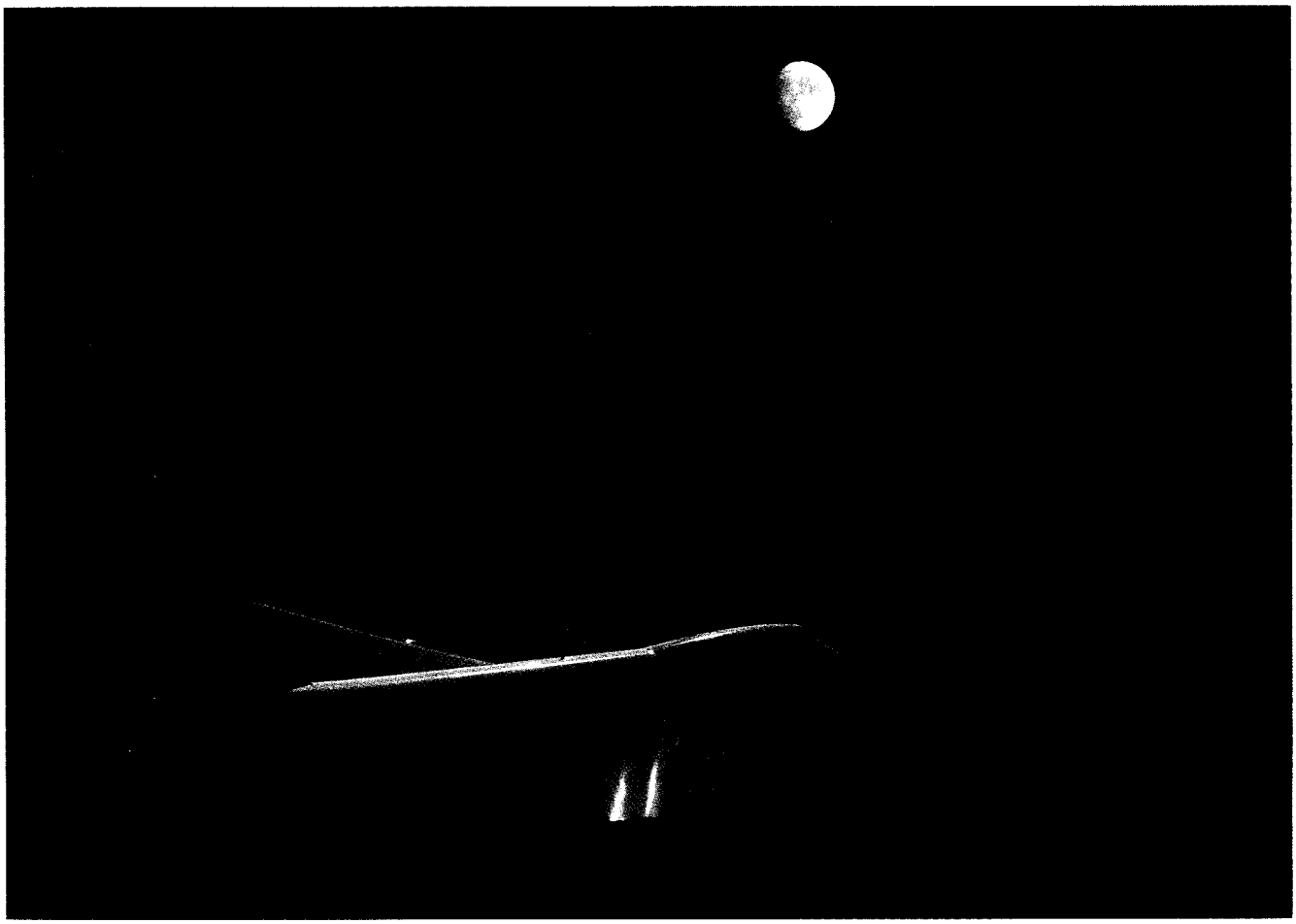

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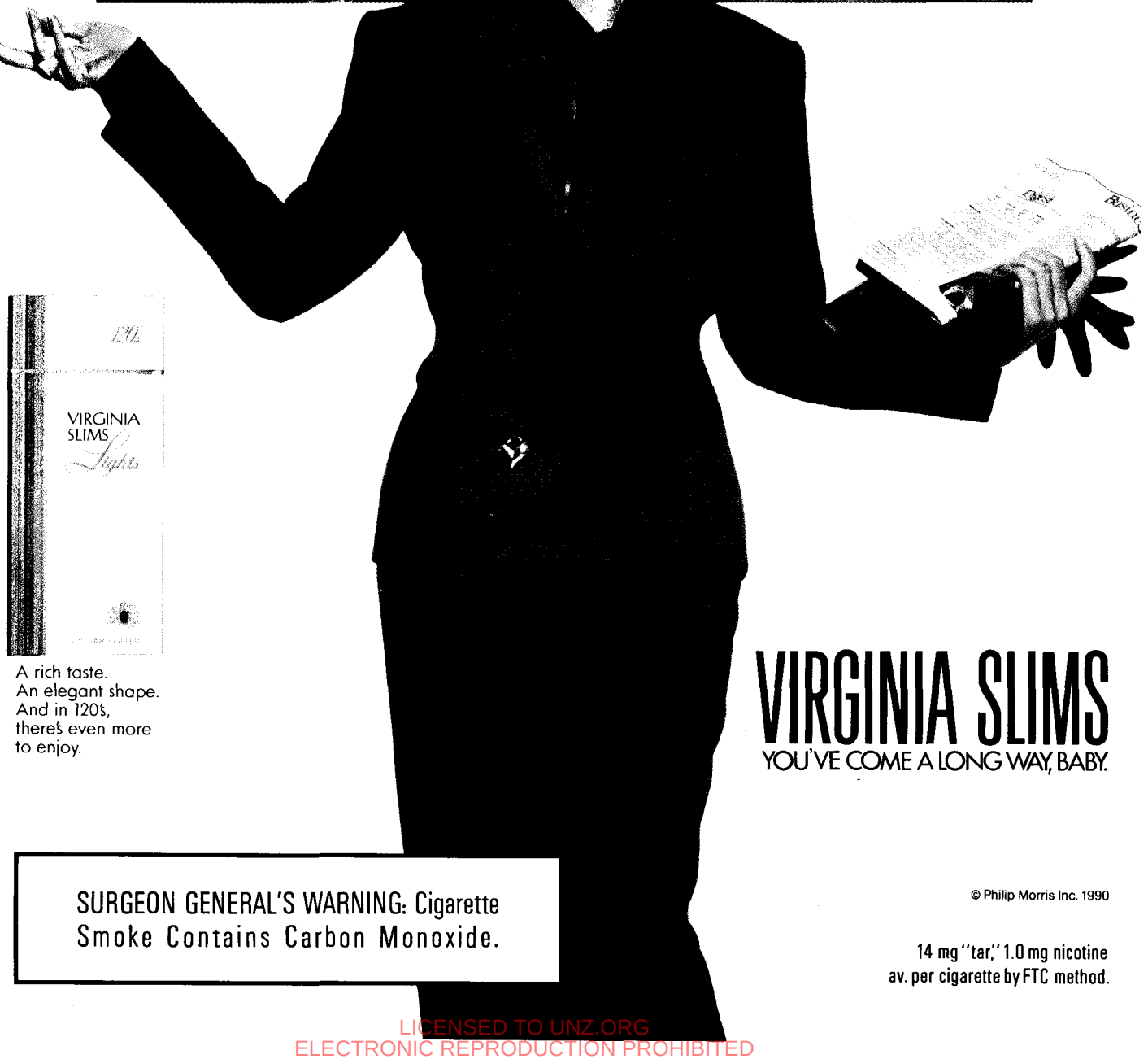
After several attempts to voice her opinion, the town council finally yielded the floor to Valerie Jordan.



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